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Totalitarian Politics and Individual Responsibility: Revising Hannah Arendt's Inner Dialogue through the Notion of Confession in J. M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*

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Abstract:	<p>Hannah Arendt's writings concerning individual responsibility create an important—and underexamined—context for reading J. M. Coetzee's oeuvre, particularly his novel <i>Waiting for the Barbarians</i>. For Arendt, when a society fails to offer ethical codes of conduct to follow, people should determine those codes by themselves, since morality concerns people in their individuality during totalitarian times. Arendt's ideas bear important similarities to Coetzee's representation of the magistrate in the novel, as this character struggles to live with his conscience in a totalitarian regime. In Arendt's world, introspection is only needed when the world around us fails to guarantee moral laws, and even then one should not focus on oneself only but instead try to focus on the world around us. Coetzee, however, shows through the character of the magistrate how this internal dialogue easily becomes torturous in its nature. If political action is the most important aspect of Arendt's thinking, then Coetzee shows through the character of the magistrate how modern, conscientious humans cannot just act politically; instead, their action is always marked by their personal weaknesses, including their feelings of inadequacy. Nevertheless, even if Arendt emphasizes political action more than Coetzee, who shows that such action is necessarily marked by individual doubt, self-questioning and other personal inadequacies, the reliance on radical thinking, which is at odds with conformism, is a concern they share.</p>

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Totalitarian Politics and Individual Responsibility: Revising Hannah Arendt's Inner Dialogue through the Notion of Confession in J. M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*

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Introduction

Hannah Arendt's views on imperialism as a test laboratory for emerging European totalitarianism in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* have been seen as an important early contribution to the corpus of postcolonial theory (Grosse 2006: p 36). In analysing the ways in which European imperial power formations in the colonies enabled subsequent totalitarian structures to emerge in Europe itself, *The Origins* focuses on "South Africa as the seed-bed of imperialism and bureaucratic racism integral to the world system" (Moran 2013: p. 277). This violent political order was, however, not merely "imported" to Europe, but instead, imperialism and its subsequent nondemocratic forms of government rooted themselves firmly on the African continent as well. As Christopher J. Lee (2011) argues, it is pivotal that some scholars have "returned [Arendt's] concern toward the legacies of imperialism to the continent of Africa, not Europe, thus conveying a means for thinking through and applying her ideas to postcolonial politics more generally" (p. 103).¹ It is also my interest here to consider Arendt's writings on totalitarianism in connection to the legacies of imperialism in Africa. More specifically, my analysis will focus on J. M. Coetzee's representation of totalitarianism in his novel *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980), a purposefully distanced analysis of the apartheid regime. I claim that in this novel, Coetzee, like Arendt, is troubled by the problem of thoughtlessness, as both scrutinize the ways in which, to use the words of Patrick Hayden (2009), we tend to become "desensitized to the banal, thoughtless, 'ordinary' origins of . . . violence" directed at selected groups of people in totalitarian systems (p. 33).

¹Important work concerning Arendt's analysis of imperialism and totalitarianism in relation to post-independent African political rule has been undertaken by scholars including Mamdani (1996) and Evans (1997).

An emphasis on thinking brings the philosopher Arendt and the novelist Coetzee together. Like Arendt in her writings, Coetzee, in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, is interested in understanding how individuals can avoid morally questionable actions during politically corrupted times. They both suggest that the only way for an individual to resist immoral behavior in dubious situations, in which common laws fail to guarantee civilized action or the protection of human rights, is by relying on his or her inner dialogue. Such an inner dialogue is crucial to Arendt's definition of thinking. Since Coetzee also examines the notion of having a dialogue with oneself to avoid misconduct in dark times, Arendt's emphasis on thinking provides an important, yet underexamined, context for reading Coetzee's oeuvre.²

At the same time, the differences between their approaches should be noted as well. Arendt is a political thinker whose focus is on the public world. For Arendt, thinking as an activity is potentially problematic to the extent that it happens between me and myself, and hence takes place outside the world; it "has no political relevance unless special emergencies arise" (Arendt 1978a: p. 192). Thus Socratic introspection, or thinking, which should take place between two inner partners who are in agreement, is needed to guide our actions in the world only when the world fails to guarantee our moral codes, but even then, the focus must be on the world we share, and on the question of how to maintain or rebuild it as a public space where everyone can act together. Internal self-questioning should thus be kept to a minimum in order for one to maintain one's focus on the world. In the context of analyzing the idea of people living with their consciences, Arendt differentiates between two positions: good men and good citizens.³ If a good man needs to live in harmony with himself, no matter what, then a good citizen must balance two priorities: remaining true to himself and maintaining or creating a public realm around him. "In the center of moral considerations of human conduct stands the self," Arendt (2003c) writes, "in the center of political

²Only *Elizabeth Costello* of Coetzee's novels has been discussed in connection to Hannah Arendt's work (see Ryan 2005; Rose 2004).

³Arendt (1969) further differentiates between good men and good citizens in her essay "Civil Disobedience" (pp. 64-5). Some Arendt scholars also discuss these categories of men in Arendt's thinking (see Breen 2012: p. 108; Canovan 1992: pp. 178-9).

considerations of conduct stands the world” (p. 153). A good man prioritizes his own conscience since he, like Henry Thoreau, believes that “individuals must follow their conscience even if the cost of this was the downfall of the republic” (Canovan 1992: p. 194), whereas a good citizen is a figure who, according to Keith Breen (2012), “accepts that worldly realities must take precedence over the self’s congruence with self” (p. 109). The latter position is the one Arendt prioritizes. Nevertheless, I argue here, through my reading of Coetzee’s novel, that such distinction between good men and good citizens becomes more complicated in the modern world as modern conscientious men can hardly find peace through their internal thinking process in the midst of political terror. Being a good man in an Arendtian or a Socratic sense might be almost impossible in the context of totalitarianism: the corrupt political power regime implicates everyone, and thus it remains exceedingly difficult to wash one’s hands of the political scene. Thus living with one’s conscience is particularly troublesome in such contexts. But regardless of this, modern people still have a duty to act as responsible citizens and do everything they can to change the world into a better place.

Such complications concerning the internal dialogue are also related to a change in the worldview after antiquity. In “Some Questions,” Arendt also elaborates on the differences between the ancient and the Christian worlds. Namely, Christianity brought along the notion of self-doubt, and due to this, the activity of thinking as an amicable relationship between two inner partners is drastically shaken, especially when the faculty of willing enters this inner dialogue.⁴ In this context, Arendt (1978b) writes that the Apostle Paul, like Socrates, brings up the concept of “two-in-one, but these two are not friends or partners; they are in constant struggle with each other” (p. 64). Now the focus is shifted from exterior matters and questions, and is turned instead to the self and its inner resistance since “the factors interfering with the mind’s activity rise out of the mind itself” (p. 64). In other words, one might know what one ought to do to act in a correct way, but one cannot, or

⁴ The faculty of willing emerges, unlike the thinking activity, which was already known to Greek antiquity, during the first century of the Christian era” (*Willing*, 3).

does not want to, act in such a way. This idea that one must second-guess oneself and keep watch on oneself not only shows how far from antiquity the ideas concerning the human mind have travelled, but it also indicates that “to be ‘at variance with yourself,’ has become part and parcel of the human condition” (p. 83).

But when internal dialogue turns into a tribunal modern, conscientious people have within themselves, there is a risk that one’s focus is too much on personal feelings, rather than on the world around oneself. Arendt (1978b) suggests that there is “an inevitable flaw in all critical examinations of the willing faculty... simply that every *philosophy* of the Will is conceived and articulated not by men of action but by philosophers . . . [who] are more inclined to ‘interpret’ the world than ‘to change it’” (p. 195). Thus Arendt is not pleased with these changes as this internal turn tends to take our focus away from worldly issues and instead highlight individual’s internal accusations. Arendt is particularly critical of the modern world and its focus on individualism, and criticizes “the modern age [for having] led to a quite literal flight . . . from preoccupations with the world to preoccupations with the self” (Meehan 2002: p. 187). Arendt is critical of the modern dilemmas of introspection, including self-doubt, even if these phenomena haunt modern, thinking women and men living in corrupt political situations.⁵ Her reasons are valid, nevertheless: internal self-accusations might be too wrapped up with the self, and thus the focus on the world around one becomes obscured.⁶ Thus self-accusations are not politically useful unless one is able to put them aside and follow every citizen’s responsibility to act towards the public good in compromised

⁵Arendt was also highly critical of psychology. For her, modern psychology functioned as an ideology that attempted to pacify our capacity for critical thinking and acting in the world: “Insofar as psychology tries to ‘help’ us, it helps us ‘adjust’ to those conditions, taking away our only hope, namely that we, who are not of the desert though we live in it, are able to transform it into a human world” (2005: p. 201).

⁶Arendt (2003a) maintains that it is thinking, not feelings, that is important for individuals who try to make decisions in ethically difficult situations (p. 108). Arendt, unlike Karl Jaspers, fiercely criticized the idea of a strong sense of guilt playing an important political role in post-war German culture as it tried to come to terms with war crimes. She (2003c) states that “such metaphorical statements [like ‘we all are guilty’] . . . when taken literally, can only lead into a phony sentimentality in which all real issues are obscured” (p. 147-8). Thus for Arendt, as Schaap (2001) puts it, “publicity distorts guilt into a sentimentality that undermines genuine political engagement” (p. 757). Instead, she emphasizes focusing on the political ways in which real change can be introduced. For Arendt, the “next generation of Germans should initiate worldly change, not indulge in public lamentation” (Schaap 2002: p. 756). Arendt thus insists that the focus should be on collective responsibility, rather than on collective guilt.

situations. Therefore, instead of letting one's thought processes revolve around one's own sentiments and one's potential culpability or innocence, one should prioritize the need to work for democracy in the public world one shares with others. In other words, it is the public world that takes priority over the responsible citizen's private conscience that enables political existence. The only viable response to evil in the world is to resist it: "If you do not resist evil, the evildoers will do as they please. Though it is true that, by resisting evil, you are likely to be involved in evil, your care for the world takes precedence in politics over your care for your self" (Arendt 1989: p. 50). In other words, one must acknowledge personal implication but one must also get beyond the moral pain it causes because there are worse things happening in the world than one's own internal accusations or moral purity. If morally good people want to stay away from any questionable action, then Arendt seems to suggest that there are times when one must act in dubious circumstances if only one can. Naturally, this can be a painful position for a person trying to maintain a balance between this need to be a good citizen and the need to live with one's conscience.

At the same time, though, the modern world, with its forms of political terror, including totalitarianism, has made it quite difficult for conscientious people to avoid internal accusations that can be prolonged and painful. If Arendt does not have much sympathy for such ongoing self-questioning, her reasons are clear: in such circumstances, inward discourse can lure one away from action rather than taking one toward it, and this is particularly a problem if one lets the nature of the self-questioning become overtly accusatory. In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, Coetzee presents in the character of the magistrate, a modern individual who cannot avoid self-questioning. Through the magistrate, Coetzee examines the individual's internal terror and contradictions: the magistrate tries to live with his conscience during the darkest of times. Thinking brings not harmony or agreement, but rather further thinking and introspection. Coetzee's magistrate revises the Socratic inner dialogue by bringing it into a modern context of political terror, and by illustrating the extent to which the situation is more complicated for a modern individual trying to live ethically than it was

for Socrates. This means that we are not always aware of our hidden motives, which nevertheless affect our actions in the world. This, in turn, alters the notion of internal dialogue, which becomes confessional in nature as one tries one's best to honestly assess one's deeds. This process is not straightforward, but instead uses roundabouts and detours because we are not often pleased to face our darker motives, which we nevertheless need to examine. Coetzee's character of the magistrate brings the idea of inner dialogue into the context of the modern world, in which internal interrogation paradoxically becomes the modern curse of *the thinking man*, who lives in morally corrupt social conditions while trying to rely on his internal dialogue in order to find the least corrupted way to exist.

I read Coetzee's magistrate as an example of a modern, conscientious person trying to balance political action with personal feelings of inadequacy. He represents a modern man who must tolerate feelings of guilt and shame, yet remain able to act in a world where injustice happens all the time. Coetzee's representation of the magistrate shows that modern people living in difficult situations cannot avoid self-accusations, but also that such personal feelings cannot tell them in the end how to act in the world because they need to consider what is best for the world, and not only for themselves. Arendt (1994) writes, for instance, that "shame at being a human being is the purely personal and still non-political expression" of the fact that humans are capable of horrible actions (p. 131). Rather than thinking only about his own morality, including his shame and guilt, the magistrate is also aware of his responsibility to maintain a world in which injustice should be confronted.

Even if Arendt emphasizes political action more than Coetzee, who shows that such action is necessarily marked by individual doubt, self-questioning and other personal inadequacies, the reliance on radical thinking, which is at odds with conformism, is a concern they share. Arendt (1978a) maintains that there are times when thinking becomes a kind of political action: "When everybody is swept away unthinkingly by what everybody else does and believes in, those who

think are drawn out of hiding because their refusal to join in is conspicuous and thereby becomes a kind of action. In such emergencies, it turns out that the purging component of thinking is political by implication” (p. 192). Furthermore, as we have seen, for both Arendt and Coetzee, this politicized resistance, brought along by thinking, is needed not only in relation to one’s own position in the world or to one’s own “moral purity,” but also in relation to one’s ethical treatment of others. In other words, both Arendt and Coetzee are horrified by what thoughtlessness allows us to do to others. In writing about totalitarian systems, they seem to share the idea that, to use Roger Berkowitz’s (2009) words, “one capacity of thinking—to imagine that the people we are harming are people like ourselves—is our only meaningful defense against the poisonous fictions that reduce a world of plurality into a single and consonant ideology” (p. 9).

Hannah Arendt’s Notion of Socratic Thinking and Its Limitations in the Context of Modern Terror

Hannah Arendt’s view on modernity is particularly critical because the modern age fails to encourage people to do independent or radical thinking. Her political philosophy insists that humans should be able to act together on an equal basis in the public world, and that in their plurality, which is “specifically the condition . . . of all political life,” they build a democratic world together (Arendt 1958: p. 7). Modern times, however, collapse the private and public realms together by creating a social realm which is no longer based on humans’ plurality, but rather on their similarity.⁷ Arendt (1958) writes, “the emergence of the social realm, which is neither private nor public, strictly speaking, is a relatively new phenomenon whose origin coincided with the emergence of the modern age and which found its political form in the nation-state” (p. 28). She (1958) further states that “[a modern] society expects from each of its members a certain kind of behaviour, imposing

⁷ In *The Human Condition* (1958), Arendt clarifies how the two realms—public and private—function in ancient Greece: if freedom for men to act in their plurality “is exclusively located in the political realm” (p. 31), then “the mastering of the necessities of life in the household was the condition for freedom of the *polis*” (p. 30-31). Since “plurality is the condition of human action” (p. 8), Arendt (1958) writes, “it is decisive that [modern] society, on all its levels, excludes the possibility of action, which formerly was excluded from the household.

innumerable and various rules, all of which tend to ‘normalize’ its members, to make them behave, to exclude spontaneous action or outstanding achievement” (p. 40). In such situations, in which uniform identity is enforced, modern ideologies are easily spread. The worst political system to emerge in the modern world, one which expects unanimous national identity, is totalitarianism, as totalitarian governments’ “total domination reaches out into all, not only the political, spheres of life . . . [and] an unequivocal acceptance of the ruling principles is . . . demanded” (Arendt 2003b, p. 33). In modern societies, where independent thinking is not advocated and people are discouraged from challenging societal truths, modern ideologies may become fatal if they are accepted unquestioningly.

To challenge this thoughtlessness of the modern world and its inhabitants, Arendt turns to another form of thinking, or as George Kateb (2009) puts it, “one kind of thinking must struggle against the corrupted versions of another kind” (p. 38). Arendt (2006) was led in this direction of inquiry by the Adolf Eichmann case, as she was convinced that Eichmann was not a diabolic mastermind, but instead that his evil actions sprung from his “inability to *think*” (p. 49). Thus Eichmann served as a perfect example of a modern person who had *learned not to think* on his own. As Peg Birmingham (2007) notes, his “all-too-easily-replaced voice of conscience . . . points to the fragile identity of the modern subject” (p. 110). In this sense, one of Arendt’s guiding questions is: “What helps to reduce susceptibility to murderous ideologies and fictions? It is cultivating the readiness to think for oneself and to form one’s judgment in the actual or invisible company of those who think for themselves” (Kateb 2009: p. 33). Kateb (2009) further adds that this type of Socratic thinking “is a potent weapon against systems that try to impose a higher and comprehensive meaning on the world” (p. 37). This attempt to think on one’s own might provide a rare moment in modernity when one can differentiate oneself from the unanimous voice of society and thus keep alive the possibility of plurality.

In “Some Questions of Moral Philosophy,” Arendt further discusses how thinking as an

activity could save us from morally corrupted behaviour under totalitarianism. In this regard, Arendt extends the radical Socratic thinking activity to concern the dialogue one has with oneself. Arendt maintains that this activity of thinking, as an inner dialogue, is crucial when society no longer supports moral behavior, because it is the only way in which we can keep clear of immorality (2003a: p. 106). In such situations, one needs to ask one's own conscience what is the right form of conduct because civil laws are undermined. In this framework, Arendt (2003a) analyzes the model of Socratic dialogue, in which one has an ethical conversation with oneself "about whatever happens to concern" one (pp. 97-8). In this scenario, ethical actions do not derive from moral doxa, but instead result from an inner dialogue. The underlying principle is Socrates's famous line: "it is better to suffer wrong than to do wrong" (Arendt 2003a: p. 72). According to this logic, one engages in Socratic dialogue because one wants to consider one's actions thoroughly as a means of avoiding wrongdoing because if one failed to engage in such forms of self-reflection, one would possibly have to live with a wrongdoer. For a thinking person, it would be hellish to live with a wrongdoer because one could never escape this inner partner and its accusations. Thus, in Arendt's reading of Socrates, it is worse to be out of harmony with oneself than to be out of harmony with the whole world because one can escape the world but not one's inner partner. Therefore, "the only criterion of Socratic thinking is agreement," Arendt writes (1978a), "to be consistent with oneself, *homologeîn autos heautō*: its opposite, to be in contradiction with oneself, *enantia legeîn autos heautō*, actually means becoming one's own adversary" (p. 186). For Arendt (1978a), then, thinking represents a dialogue between inner partners who are each other's friends: "to Socrates, the duality of the two-in-one meant no more than that if you want to think, you must see to it that the two who carry on the dialogue be in good shape, that the partners be friends" (p. 188). We have seen, however, that such amicable relations between the inner partners come into crisis during Christianity and later in modernity, as the congruence between the inner partners is often lost. After the faculty of willing has emerged with its possibility to say 'no' to reason, then the

notion of the inner dialogue as a form of conscience also changes, especially when Kant brings obligation and fear of self-punishment into the discussion of conscience: “In the case of Kant, conscience threatens you with self-contempt; in the case of Socrates . . . with self-contradiction” (Arendt 2003a: p. 78). Modern, conscientious people, including Coetzee’s magistrate, are more Kantian than Socratic in this sense, as we will see.⁸

The model of Socratic dialogue sounds like an ideal way of living with one’s conscience during times of political crisis, but in modern political circumstances such as totalitarianism, this mode of thinking that enables harmony between inner partners might become problematic. In this respect, it is quite interesting that Arendt uses the model of Socratic dialogue to discuss internal ethics during totalitarianism in “Some Questions of Moral Philosophy” and *The Life of the Mind*, even if she had written much earlier that totalitarianism creates circumstances in which ethically-bound lifestyles can be practically impossible. Namely, in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt (1973) writes that

Totalitarian terror achieved its most terrible triumph when it succeeded in cutting the moral person off from the individualist escape and in making the decisions of conscience absolutely *questionable and equivocal*. When a man is faced with the alternative of betraying and thus murdering his friend or of sending his wife and children, for whom he is in every sense responsible, to their death; when even suicide would mean the immediate murder of his own family—how is he to decide? (p. 452)

⁸Arendt (1978a) often uses the terms “Socratic dialogue” and “conscience” interchangeably. When referring to the internal dialogue a thinking man must have with himself in solitude, she writes: “later times have given the fellow who awaits Socrates in his home the name of ‘conscience.’ Before its tribunal, to adopt Kantian language, we have to appear and give account of ourselves” (p. 190). Here the terms—“Socratic dialogue” and “conscience”—share much in common, as they both indicate the need for honesty when facing one’s inner partner. Thus conscience often becomes just another way of referring to the internal dialogue that Socrates first discovered: “Conscience is the anticipation of the fellow who awaits you if and when you come home” (p. 191). There are differences though, too, considering what the term “conscience” has come to mean after antiquity. Even if Arendt often uses the term conscience interchangeably with the Socratic dialogue with oneself, she (2003a) nevertheless clearly maintains that the term conscience did not exist in antiquity but was introduced through Christianity: “it was discovered as the organ in man which hears the voice of God” (p. 107).

Arendt (1973) concludes that one of the brilliant, although morally debased, techniques of totalitarianism was to constantly blur “the distinguishing line between persecutor and persecuted, between the murderer and his victim” (p. 453). Arendt (1973) writes, “through the creation of conditions under which conscience ceases to be adequate and to do good becomes utterly impossible, the consciously organized complicity of all men in the crimes of totalitarian regimes is extended to the victims and thus made really total” (p. 452). This shows how clear moral thinking becomes utterly difficult in these conditions and how thinking as a means of avoiding immoral action becomes almost impossible.

In fact, Arendt’s earlier approach in *The Origins* suggests a much more complicated view regarding difficult ethical dilemmas individuals face during totalitarianism than her later Socratic view does. In these lines from *The Origins*, we are quite far from the idea of a Socratic dialogue with oneself as an existential tool to avoid wrongdoing in a morally corrupted society. When totalitarian terror manages to blur the lines “between the murderer and his victim,” we can no longer find moral internal clarity: the choices the regime forces people to make do not let them stay outside the regime or feel good about any decisions they have to make. In other words, the regime forces them to become corrupted. It might be impossible to find inner peace during such a time. Instead, such circumstances might push an individual who tries to live an ethically balanced life to experience a tumultuous inner chaos and ongoing self-questioning.

Even if totalitarianism created these impossible ethical dilemmas for people to tackle, Arendt shifted her focus from this aspect of totalitarianism that blurs the lines between the perpetrators and victims in her later career, when she analysed the Socratic model of inner dialogue as enabling its practitioner to avoid morally suspect behaviour during such times. In “Some Questions of Moral Philosophy,” Arendt (2003a) writes that the Socratic model is as valid in the modern world as it was in ancient Greece:

Socratic morality . . . has revealed itself as the only working morality in borderline situations, that is, in times of crisis and emergency. When standards are no longer valid anyhow—as in Athens in the last third of the fifth century and in the fourth century, or in Europe in the last third of the nineteenth century and in the twentieth century—nothing is left but the examples of Socrates. (p. 106)

I claim here that when discussing the internal dialogue with oneself in the context of totalitarianism, one cannot just go back to the Socratic model, but rather must consider these elements of internal terror that are brought along by totalitarian political contexts. As we have seen, Arendt, in *The Origins*, shows how amicable relations with oneself might sometimes be impossible to reach or maintain in the context of totalitarianism. This does not mean, however, that the Socratic model should be abandoned, not at all, but it does mean that internal dialogue might become more complicated and painful, and that the two-in-one cannot always maintain reciprocal congruence.

When we bring this problematic to the field of totalitarianism, we can see how twentieth-century philosophical texts, fictional representations, and even popular culture have complicated the notion of one's inner dialogue with oneself in contexts in which democratic rule has collapsed: in twentieth-century texts, the Socratic dialogue between inner partners who remain in amicable relations with each other has often been turned into a turbulent self-questioning, which resembles much more the Apostle Paul's inner struggle than the Socratic understanding of an inner dialogue. In the context of writings focusing on the Nazi Holocaust, writers often depict an inner torment concerning their actions during moral crisis. Very often indeed, these texts highlight the limitations of personal feelings of inadequacy, guilt and shame, which are very natural responses to such horrors. However, at the same time, the focus might turn to internal questioning and away from political action and the political need to introduce worldly change. Such an internal turbulence is nevertheless a part of modern life, and people living in difficult political situations often must balance their self-accusations and their involvement in worldly issues.

One example of such an internal questioning comes from Primo Levi, who, in *The Drowned and the Saved*, describes the shame and guilt that followed the survivors. One reason for an acute feeling of guilt, which even led people to commit suicide after they had once again reached freedom, was the awareness “that we had not done anything, or not enough, against the system into which we had been absorbed” (1989: p.57). Levi describes people who experienced acute forms of suffering, and whose resistance to the system that overpowered them would have been met with more torture and most probably with death, yet they still subsequently felt that their own actions were inadequate. Timothy Bewes (2011) notes that “after such an experience, one’s very survival is testament to the fact that there was more that one could have done to resist; a person’s life, his or her very existence, is a cause of shame” (p. 20-21). Thus Levi (1989) writes that in these conditions, “self-accusation is . . . realistic, or the accusation of having failed in terms of human solidarity” (p. 58-59). Levi’s example illustrates how the inner dialogue he describes more closely resembles an internal battle than an amicable conversation, particularly in the context of political terror.

Another example of self-questioning comes from a very different type of source, namely from Steven Spielberg’s popular film *Schindler’s List*. Obviously Schindler’s situation differs from Levi’s in various ways, as he is a free man helping Jews to escape from the horrors of the Holocaust. His intense self-questioning is featured at the end of the film, when Schindler is thanked by the Jewish community for the work he has done in saving the Jewish people from Nazi horrors. Instead of receiving the thanks, he collapses, as he realizes that he could and should have done much more to save Jewish people from being sent to the camps. He realizes that he would have had the means to do so, but he did not. This is the most important moment in the film, as Schindler’s own introspection reveals to him that he should not be celebrated as a hero, not even as a person who did his best in the circumstances, but rather that he should be seen as a person whose personal interest in wealth stopped him from acting more ethically. Again, his internal questioning closely resembles modern forms of self-doubt. This indicates how the character of Schindler is a modern

man whose political action is plagued by his own personal weaknesses. He is neither a good nor a bad man, but someone trying to come to terms with his weaknesses in a belated fashion, which makes him feel guilty. At the same time, he has acted in the world too, by trying to save human lives, but as a modern, conscientious man, he has difficulty in coming to terms with the fact that he “only did so much.” This shows how modern humans, particularly the thinking people who live with their consciences, remain incapable of purely political action since such action is always haunted by the acknowledgement of their personal weaknesses. Yet at the same time, his position is Arendtian to the extent that he has resisted evil in the world—he has tried to save individuals from being sent to the camps. This has meant dirtying his own hands—doing business with Nazi criminals—because “by resisting evil, you are likely to be involved in evil” (Kant lectures, p. 50). This would be the position Arendt prioritizes, but she does not take into consideration the turbulent pain that seems to be triggered off in the minds of modern, conscientious people struggling to live in such difficult situations.

Thus, particularly during totalitarian times, painful questioning and second-guessing are often present in the mind of a person who tries to live with his or her own conscience. As the Schindler example shows, there is a paradox: to be conscientious during times of crisis leads to more inner doubt, rather than to harmony between inner partners. The modern, conscientious person must be able to live with his or her feelings of inadequacy. At the same time, paradoxically, this experience of being at variance with oneself might be the only ethically sustainable way to exist during times of moral corruption because painful internal questioning compels the conscientious individual to challenge him- or herself rather than letting him- or herself follow corrupted codes of conduct. Thus radical thinking is important because it remains aware of others and their well-being as well, rather than merely revolving around one’s own sentiments concerning one’s culpability or innocence. However, this means that one cannot get too wrapped up in it because one also needs to act in the world whenever it is possible.

I will now move on to discuss Coetzee's novel *Waiting for the Barbarians*, which also suggests, through its representation of the main character, the magistrate, that self-doubt is a nagging partner. Namely, it always reveals new, questionable truths concerning one's culpability if one wants to remain conscientious during totalitarianism. Coetzee's magistrate shows how internal interrogation paradoxically becomes a modern curse of *the thinking man*, living in morally corrupt social conditions where he must rely on his internal dialogue in order to find the least corrupted way to exist. I still maintain, however, that Coetzee's magistrate is also concerned with the best way of acting in the world, even if he is at times also wrapped up in his own feelings of guilt. His utmost motive for honesty is not only to maintain his own moral purity, but also to consider the integrity of the public world around him, which at the moment is in a state of amorality. Radical thinking is important because it helps him to remain aware of others and their well-being. It also enables him to remain suspicious of murderous modern ideologies, which pass "judgment over 'inferior races,' over individuals 'unfit to live,' over 'dying classes and decadent peoples'" (Arendt 1973: p. 465). Therefore, I read Coetzee's magistrate as an example of a modern, conscientious person trying to strike a balance between political action and personal feelings of inadequacy.

Totalitarian Politics and Individual Responsibility in *Waiting for the Barbarians*

Whereas Arendt's focus was Nazi Germany in her examination of totalitarianism, Coetzee's focus in *Waiting for the Barbarians* is a nameless empire, which to a certain extent resembles various totalitarian regimes in the modern world. This early novel was written during the heyday of the apartheid regime, the period that witnessed Steve Biko's brutal murder, among other forms of extreme state violence.⁹ In these circumstances, Coetzee decided to write a novel in which the representation of "evil" was thoroughly distanced from the regime, and instead set in an unknown

⁹Both David Attwell and Derek Attridge mention the torture and murder of Steve Biko in 1977 as a case of torture similar to the ones depicted in the novel (Attridge 2004: p. 42; Attwell 1993: p. 74).

and timeless territory, a decision which was much criticized at the time.¹⁰ Coetzee's literary style, which avoids mimetic realism, the main representational strategy associated with the "resistance literature" of the 1980s, was often condemned in the context of South African literary politics, which sought to expose the truths of a corrupted society.¹¹ However, by distancing his novelistic focus from the South African apartheid regime, he was capable of diffusing the clear line between right and wrong, and instead concentrating on the psyche of a person who is trying to live ethically but cannot. Thus the novel, to use Susan Van Zanten Gallagher's (1988) words, blurs "the distinction between 'them' and 'us,' the evil and the innocent" (p. 284). Furthermore, Coetzee's representation of the character of the magistrate subtly undermines the principles of resistance writing, which was based on the clear demarcation between an evil apartheid regime and a morally good resistance, by showing that there are grey areas in between, and that moral goodness in such circumstances might be almost impossible to achieve, even if it remains most crucial to strive for.

In the beginning of the novel, there is general hysteria in the air, as the Empire has detected a risk: barbarians are planning on attacking the fort and the Empire in general: "The barbarian tribes were arming, the rumour went; the Empire should take precautionary measures, for there would certainly be war" (Coetzee 1980: p. 8). Because the Empire has detected this threat, the civil order is suspended upon the arrival of Colonel Joll and his forces: "For the duration of the emergency, as you know," says the Colonel to the magistrate, "the administration of justice is out of the hands of civilians and in the hands of the Bureau" (p. 111). The magistrate loses his position as the guardian

¹⁰*Waiting for the Barbarians*, among Coetzee's other novels, "was accused, with increasing vehemence over the course of the early 1980s, of what South African literary criticism construed as a 'dehistoricization' of the 'real'" (Bethlehem 2001: p. 375). Paul Rich (1984) criticizes the novel for failing "to offset this [fear of barbarian invasion] against any wider historical understanding of empires and their rise and fall" (p. 387; See also JanMohammed 1985: p. 73). However, Coetzee deliberately refuses to create a direct allegorical relationship between the apartheid state and the empire in the novel because he refuses the idea that "the relation of the text to a historical reality . . . is already intelligible" (Barnett 1999: p. 292). I agree with Samuel Durrant (1999), who maintains that "Coetzee's commitment to the autonomy of his art is precisely that which ensures the political force of his novels, that his novels are only able to engage with the history of apartheid precisely by keeping their distance" (p. 432).

¹¹During this time, artists and writers were often important figures in the resistance against state power and were expected by readers and critics to take clear political stances against the state and its inhumane politics. The logic of literary politics—influenced by literary existentialism—followed the schema according to which the author "opposes apartheid through exposing it" (Bethlehem 2001: p. 367).

of law, and is pushed aside to witness the collapse of civil order and the public realm as the laws governing it become undermined. Arendt (1953) writes in “Understanding and Politics” that “the downfall of nations begins with the undermining of lawfulness, whether the laws are abused by the government in power, or the authority of their source becomes doubtful and questionable. . . . The result is that the nation, together with its ‘beliefs’ in its own laws, loses its capacity for responsible political action” (p. 384). The magistrate registers this particular phenomenon of undermining lawfulness taking place, and observes how the Empire “loses its capacity for responsible political action,” including the maintenance of people’s safety and access to legal protection, in its treatment of the barbarians. Colonel Joll, as the highest state authority, proclaims a state of exception and issues emergency decrees to imprison and torture helpless and peaceful barbarians, who are now considered enemies of the Empire. The civil laws represented by the magistrate’s administration are replaced by a combination of martial laws and random police violence, of which Colonel Joll is in charge. Colonel Joll and his associates thus bring along a new style of rule that differs from the magistrate’s law-preserving style.

What both Arendt and Coetzee analyze in their respective contexts is the difficulty of living according to strong moral codes when the society around one has decided that such moral codes can be discarded, and the way in which people tend to accommodate to new circumstances quite quickly. To illustrate this, we could note that Arendt was horrified that most Germans, the so-called respectable people, accepted the new moral codes provided by Nazism, because as Margaret Canovan (1992) writes, “ordinary decent moral people adapted to Nazism with ease as soon as it became the established order” (p. 160). This tacit approval of the respectable society around him also enables Eichmann’s work in Nazi Germany. Arendt (2006) writes that “his conscience was indeed set at rest when he saw the zeal and eagerness with which ‘good society’ everywhere reacted as he did. He did not need to ‘close his ears to the voice of conscience,’ as the judgment has it, not because he had none, but because his conscience spoke with a ‘respectable voice,’ with the voice of

respectable society around him” (p. 126). Similarly to this, Coetzee’s novel illustrates how quickly, in the world of the Empire, the threat of the barbarian army attacking the fort leads the peaceful “barbarians” to be turned into enemies, capable of being freely tortured and killed if need be without any further justification. The citizens of the fort quickly accept this new “truth” concerning the barbarians. This moral collapse further enables a new “sense of moral obligation” among the forces of the Empire, who, in quite the same way as Eichmann in Arendt’s account, are “concerned to do the right thing” (Canovan 1992: p. 160). Thus, as Kateb (2009) writes about Arendt’s thinking, “the leading perpetrators do not feel . . . that they are doing or even intending wrong; rather, they . . . think sincerely that they are serving a mission of some kind” (p. 31). In the case of Coetzee’s fictional Empire, this means the liquidation of the so-called barbarian forces, a project undertaken by Colonel Joll, even if everyone can tell that barbarians are not in any way threatening society. In short, Coetzee’s novel clearly illustrates this collapse of moral order and the substitution of one set of moral codes for another, quite fatal one.

This indicates, then, that ordinary people, who are not committing crimes but are still following the new rules, are far from innocent in either the world of Nazi Germany or in Coetzee’s Empire. And this is the topic Coetzee so painfully addresses in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, as his main focus is not on the torturers Warrant Officer Mandell and Colonel Joll, but instead on the nameless magistrate. What makes this examination of the magistrate’s proximity to the torturers especially painful is the fact that he is “a man of conscience,” as Coetzee (1992b) characterizes him in his essay “Into a Dark Chamber,” meaning that he does not follow the herd mentality and easily conclude that the barbarians are the new enemies of the Empire (p. 363). The magistrate concludes, instead, “that once in every generation, without fail, there is an episode of hysteria about the barbarians. . . . Show me a barbarian army and I will believe” (Coetzee 1980: p. 9). He is capable of individual thinking during times when others accept new, very questionable moral codes to blindly follow, and throughout the novel, he suggests that the forces of the Empire are themselves acting as

barbarians. But nevertheless, even if he is capable of his own thinking, he still must acknowledge his proximity to Colonel Joll again and again. To be a man of conscience thus means not being ethically pure, but instead attempting to live with one's conscience, which in the context of totalitarianism proves to be exceedingly difficult due to one's implication in the power regime.

Both Arendt and Coetzee show how, in the context of a totalitarian state, one's own conscience can sometimes be the only safeguard against moral corruption. Arendt (2003a) concludes that particularly during the darkest of times, "morality concerns the individual in his singularity" (p. 97). What this means, then, in relation to the novel, is that the main character engages in an inner dialogue with himself; namely, while the moral order around him has collapsed, meaning that people can do whatever they please to the barbarians, it is not society but his own conscience that will remind him of his potentially devious acts against the barbarians. Coetzee shows how the character of the magistrate seeks to live with his conscience as he lets his introspection direct him during this time of crisis. This introspection is an unavoidable curse, but opting out of thinking or this inner dialogue would be even worse: it would make him indifferent to the corrupted world around him, as well as to his own actions in it. The dialogue he has with himself is particularly important as it helps him to keep distance from murderous modern ideologies, and to maintain an understanding of barbarians as humans who need protection and whose rights need to be respected in the present.

The main character in *Waiting for the Barbarians* does his best to live with his conscience. He is capable of examining his own morally corrupted situation because he engages in a dialogue with himself, and lets his inner partner expose his culpability again and again. In the beginning of the novel, he acutely observes his own implication in the crimes committed against the helpless barbarian prisoners. When thinking of Colonel Joll, he concludes: "who am I to assert my distance from him? I drink with him, I eat with him, I show him the sights, I afford him every assistance as his letter of commission requests and more" (Coetzee 1980: p. 5). The magistrate does not torture

the barbarian prisoners, and he condemns those who do. However, as Arendt (2003b) writes regarding times of totalitarian rule, “[w]hoever participates in public life at all, regardless of party membership or membership in the elite formations of the regime, is implicated in one way or another in the deeds of the regime as a whole” (p. 33). But as we also know, for Arendt (1989), being implicated in the world of evil is not the worst possibility; however, one must use one’s implication to resist evil, because if one does not, “the evildoers will do as they please” (p. 50). Nevertheless, “by resisting evil, you are likely to be involved in evil, [but] your care for the world takes precedence in politics over your care for your self” (p. 50). In a sense, then, the magistrate acts as he should: this position of being close to a wrongdoer enables him to do something to help the barbarians, even if he feels that his hands are dirtied. This is a better option than completely withdrawing from the world. At the same time, this proximity to the wrongdoer makes his internal questioning more acute. Here, then, as with the Schindler example, we see how painful it is to balance between one’s internal accusations and the need to act as a responsible citizen. Arendt demands this type of political action but does not seem to consider these “side effects” that it produces for modern people who are incomplete, yet still trying their best.

The magistrate is aware of his own implication in these crimes and struggles to create a greater distance between himself and Colonel Joll by actively resisting his decisions and helping the barbarian prisoners, which later causes him to be considered an enemy of the Empire as well. But even when trying to alleviate the pain of the prisoners, he has to confess to himself, “I cannot pretend to be any better than a mother comforting a child between his father’s spells of wrath. It has not escaped me that an interrogator can wear two masks, speak with two voices, one harsh, one seductive” (p. 7). He tries to ease his own burden by helping the barbarian prisoners, but even still, he understands that he represents the brutal regime in the eyes of the prisoners. He acknowledges that “I was the lie that Empire tells itself when times are easy, he [Colonel Joll] the truth that Empire tells itself when harsh winds blow” (p. 133). Thus his conscience refuses to let him cherish

an illusion of himself as a moral agent, but rather pushes him to acknowledge his implication in the corrupted regime. The novel reads, then, (among other things) as an account of an individual's inner battle in trying to distance himself from the regime and learn to live with himself. At the same time, his own self-accusations do not stop him from helping the tortured individuals. Thus, along with the recriminations concerning his own behavior, he also acts as a responsible citizen doing his best to alleviate the prisoners' pain.

The magistrate's dubious position becomes even clearer in his relationship to a nameless girl who is left behind by a group of barbarians who were brought in to the fort as Colonel Joll's prisoners. Tortured along with the other barbarians, she is mute, half blind and crippled after the interrogations conducted by Colonel Joll and his forces. The magistrate finds her begging on the street and brings her to his home. He suffers from the fact that Colonel Joll's forces have tortured her, but his own quest for truth as a helper and lover becomes questionable as well: his inner dialogue reveals how his own obsession with exposing the truth and understanding the horrors the girl has experienced is also suspicious. When facing her muteness, he wonders,

Is this how her torturers felt hunting their secret, whatever they thought it was? For the first time I feel a dry pity for them: how natural a mistake to believe that you can burn or tear or hack your way into the secret body of the other! The girl lies in my bed, but there is no good reason why it should be a bed. I behave in some ways like a lover—I undress her, I bathe her, I stroke her, I sleep beside her—but I might equally well tie her to a chair and beat her, it would be no less intimate. (Coetzee 1980: p. 42)

The magistrate's inner dialogue reveals that in his quest for the precarious truth, he is still the one in power, and in such a situation, the line between torturer and lover remains unclear. To rid himself of the pain and the sense of guilt that occurs when he recognizes that "[s]he is as much a prisoner now as ever before" (p. 54), he decides to take the girl back to her people. This decision makes him feel better: "[n]ow that I have committed myself to a course I sleep more easily and even detect within

myself something like happiness” (p. 57). It proves to be very difficult to live with one’s conscience during times of moral decay, and the magistrate can live with himself again only after taking the girl back to her own people.

Like anyone living in this type of totalitarian atmosphere, in which a group of people is stripped of the protection of law, the magistrate must work hard in order to be able to resist the temptation to misuse his position of power. In the novel, the situation of the nameless barbarian girl poses the most troubling questions concerning his ethical actions toward a group of people whose legal rights have been systematically demolished, and who are therefore lacking any protection against the people in power. When the magistrate returns to the fort, he is imprisoned by Colonel Joll, according to whom he is helping the barbarians too much. In the eyes of the Empire, the magistrate is guilty now because, as Arendt (1973) writes: “‘guilty’ is he who stands in the way of the natural or historical process which has passed judgment over ‘inferior races’” (465). The magistrate is guilty in the eyes of the Empire, but he cannot hang on to an idea of being morally good. Instead, he has an inner dialogue with himself, which exposes his awareness of his infringement on the rights of the barbarian girl, as well as his feeling of liberation when he can no longer occupy a position of power:

Have I truly enjoyed . . . my freedom to make of the girl whatever I felt like, wife or concubine or daughter or slave or all at once or none, at whim, because I had no duty to her save what it occurred to me feel from moment to moment: from the oppression of such freedom who would not welcome the liberation of confinement? In my opposition [against the Empire] there is nothing heroic—let me not for an instant forget that. (Coetzee 1980: pp. 76-77)

His inner dialogue exposes his culpability again; the totalitarian system, with its corrupted morals, has enabled him to treat the girl in whatever way he pleases because she lacks any legal protection against the torturers, or the magistrate himself, for that matter. This situation of lawlessness has

nevertheless been a burden to him as well, and thus he is relieved to be stripped of this freedom, as he struggles to live with his conscience.

Yet at the same time, the magistrate has done his best to act as a good citizen whose responsibility it is to safeguard moral codes in a corrupted political situation. For instance, he is arrested and imprisoned because he raises his voice against Colonel Joll during the latter's public torture session of barbarian prisoners. The magistrate shouts to Colonel Joll: "You are depraving these people" (Coetzee 1980: p. 104). The magistrate's declaration criticizes both this lawless violence against randomly chosen barbarian victims and the moral corruption Colonel Joll's deeds create within the citizens of the fort. A good citizen must do what is best for the world around him or her, and the magistrate raises his voice against the brutal Empire in order to maintain some integrity in that world. In other words, he raises his voice to stop moral corruption from taking over the civilian mindset, and also to protect the barbarians. However, soon afterwards, he succumbs to his internal accusations again, which make it clear that he could have tried to do more to help the prisoners. The novel brilliantly represents how difficult it is for a modern, conscientious person to balance internal dialogue and the need to work for the public world and its integrity.

The "resistance literature" of the 1980s was eager to condemn apartheid politics "through exposing it" (Bethlehem 2001: p. 367). South-African resistance writers were naturally quick to reproach any dubious political acts during the era of apartheid, but by so doing, they also potentially distanced the torturers, capable of such acts, from ordinary human beings. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* dismisses this ethical urgency to resist powerful regimes straightforwardly in fiction. By so doing, Coetzee also brings this topic of ordinary people existing in close proximity to torture into painful focus in his novel, by showing that even those who condemn the power regime must do everything to resist its lures, and will never be able to do so completely.

From Hannah Arendt's Reading of Socratic Inner Dialogue to Coetzee's Notion of Confession

The magistrate is a modern person living in a state of political corruption, trying his best to live with his conscience and the need to help the powerless barbarians, but his position is marked by a persistent lack. Thus Coetzee's analysis of the dilemma, through the introspection of the magistrate, updates Arendt's Socratic reading of the notion of inner dialogue by bringing it to the context of modern terror. I have argued here that the Socratic inner dialogue between the two inner partners cannot remain amicable in nature in such circumstances of modern horror. Instead, acute forms of self-questioning are prone to emerge in such contexts, when we analyze examples of conscientious people trying to balance between the right form of political action and their inner dialogues. So in Arendt's world, introspection is only needed when the world around us fails to guarantee moral laws, and even then one should not focus on oneself only but instead try to focus on the world around us. Coetzee, however, shows through the character of the magistrate how this internal dialogue becomes limited in politically difficult situations. Instead, the dialogue easily becomes torturous in its nature.

Thus, I have tried to show how Arendt's distinction between good men—who avoid morally corrupt behavior in order to be able to live with themselves—and good citizens—who feel compelled to strike a balance between their conscience and the need to work in the corrupted world—is not altogether sustainable in the context of totalitarian horror. As Arendt herself maintains in *The Origins*, totalitarian power seeks to implicate everyone, and in such circumstances it remains exceedingly difficult to clarify to oneself what is morally discreet behavior. Thus the good man's idea of withdrawing from the world and living in peace with himself would be extremely difficult in such situations. Similarly to this, the good citizen's position as the person prioritizing the best for the world becomes difficult, because it is not necessarily easy to understand what is the best form of action in the world in such situations. This is the reason I find it difficult to

understand why Arendt emphasized the Socratic model of inner dialogue in such extremely complicated political situations, rather than acknowledging the fact that modern internal dialogue is much more painful and complicated in its nature during totalitarianism than the Socratic idea warrants, as she (1978b) herself suggests elsewhere in connection to Christianity and modernity (p. 64). At the same time, it is also fully understandable that Arendt's emphasis is elsewhere: in action. She wants to avoid elaborating on modern internal horrors because such introspection might be politically invalid. Namely, if a person remains too focused on his or her own accusations, he or she turns away from the world around him or herself that needs acute attention in political crisis.

If political action is the most important aspect of Arendt's thinking, then Coetzee shows through the character of the magistrate how modern, conscientious humans cannot just act politically; instead, their action is always marked by their personal weaknesses, including their feelings of inadequacy. At the same time, I have read the character of the magistrate as a figure of a good citizen because he still tries to act in the world too, whenever it is possible for him. However, Coetzee's oeuvre is not focused on action, but rather it represents modern thinking traditions that put a heavy emphasis on introspection. For instance, the magistrate's self-doubt can be read in connection to the notion of the spiral movement of uncertainty about one's own actions that Coetzee (1992a) elaborates in his essay "Confession and Double Thoughts," in which he writes: "Because the basic movement of self-reflexiveness is a doubting and questioning movement, it is the nature of the truth to be told to itself by the reflecting self not to be final" (p. 263). Thus the evolution of truth is temporal in its nature, as the truth is created by a "doubting and questioning movement" which cannot be finalized. This process is ongoing because, as Coetzee (1992c) argues in an interview conducted by David Attwell, "there is no ultimate truth about oneself. . . . [since] one's self-interest will be located at one's blind spot" (p. 392). In this essay, Coetzee (1992a) maintains that Dostoevsky understood that "the self cannot tell the truth of itself to itself and come

to rest without the possibility of self-deception” (p. 291).¹² This is an understanding he puts to use in his representation of the magistrate as well, whose introspection is an ongoing process because of the chance of self-deception and because of the fact that he does not know all of his motives here and now. When he reflects on his actions towards the barbarian girl, for instance, he realizes that there are less attractive motives which he is not quite pleased to face. In the case of the magistrate, the doubting and questioning movement utilizes roundabouts because it is also often painful for him to acknowledge particular truths concerning himself: the knowledge concerning himself that he obtains might be distressing, and thus it is not in his interest to be aware of it. But he does face these realizations as they materialize through this doubting and questioning movement. Regarding confessional writing, Coetzee (1992a) maintains that in order to avoid complete self-deception, the author must acknowledge that “the condition of truthfulness is not perfect self-knowledge but truth-directedness” (p. 261). In his novel, the magistrate remains truth-directed but cannot claim access to the whole truth concerning himself, as he would then act in a self-deceptive manner. The magistrate, like a confessant, suffers from ongoing doubt, and is capable of reaching a version of truth concerning himself only gradually, and through detours, without being able to bring his self-examination to a conclusion.

These roundabouts Coetzee describes might sound politically disabling because they might take one further away from action rather than toward it. However, modern people who exist in politically corrupt situations might need this type of more complex internal dialogue in order to understand how the corrupted regime has corrupted their internal dialogues as well. Paradoxically, then, to clarify a right form of action in such circumstances might require some complicated internal thinking, as long as one does not forget the world around oneself.

¹²When considering the Socratic dialogue with oneself, Arendt does not focus on the possibility of self-deception, which she elaborates on in a different context. In “Lying and Politics,” Arendt (1972) discusses deception and self-deception in relation to politics and politicians, when she analyses these issues in connection to “The Pentagon Papers.” Arendt’s approach to the topic of self-deception in connection to politics is different from Coetzee’s, who sees self-deception more as a personal issue and a confessional problem concerning one’s relation to one’s own conscience.

Conclusion

Even if Arendt and Coetzee's approaches seem to partially differ from each other, they nevertheless share much in common as well. Despite the differences in terms of how they perceive the internal dialogue, for both Arendt and Coetzee this dialogue is needed not only in relation to a person's own position in the world or to his or her own "moral purity," but also in relation to his or her ethical treatment of others. Coetzee and Arendt thus both bring their focus to the world around them, even if they do so differently. Therefore, the magistrate's introspection is not completely self-centered at all, because he enters the process of self-questioning in order to enable himself to come to terms with his responsibilities toward those people around him who have been stripped of their legal protection. He cannot perform morally sound actions without some detours as his self-knowledge is often painful and hidden, and can only be found through the "doubting and questioning movement" Coetzee describes elsewhere because in the context of the corrupted modern political world, we often must become aware of the personal weaknesses that plague our capacity to "do the right thing." Coetzee's approach is focused on individual responsibility, which is haunted by lack and a deferral of meaning. However, his ongoing confessional movement also bears larger implications: this introspection has a strong sociopolitical value as it guides one to closely consider how to relate to those around one who have been reduced to a situation of powerlessness. Coetzee's representation of the internal dialogue is related to Arendt's understanding of it, as it brings similar questions into the context of the contemporary world, in which people make efforts to live with themselves and act the best they can. Coetzee's representation of the magistrate's inner dialogue as a mode of confession becomes a revised reading of the Arendtian inner dialogue, which, in his novel, is the only viable method of keeping distance from wrongdoing during totalitarian times.

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