A PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVE ON GROUP POLARIZATION

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by

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ABSTRACT

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Polarization has become an increasingly concern for the United States, especially in recent years. The political parties have refrained from working together, but instead have been dehumanizing one another that has been triggered by media platforms. Philosophy is a field of study that instills value into basic ideas in our world. That being said, the aim of political philosophy is to find the value of political entities in our societies. Evaluating these ideals allow us to answer a question: Which philosophical political ideals can we use to create solutions to the increased polarization in the United States?

In order to answer this question, this work analyzes philosophical texts such as Plato's *Statesman*, Aristotle's *Politics*, and Hannah Arendt's *Between Past and Future* to find ideals that are best suited to find ways to decrease polarization. While looking at the current state of United States politics, this work also analyzes the role modern media platforms play in group polarization. Combining these elements provides a framework based on philosophical political ideals on how we can prevent group polarization from increasing any more in this country.

This project contains four main solutions, which are tied to philosophical ideals, in order to diminish the divide between the modern partisan groups. First, from Arendt's ideals on the importance of freedom of speech in our political entities, we as individuals need to respect not only our right, but as well as that same right of others. Next, Plato's ideals of a political leader's responsibility to unify different people in the community tells us we, as a society, need to hold our political leaders accountable for accomplishing this goal. The third solution is to take action to encourage modern media platforms to take measures to change their role in polarization and is derived from Arendt's emphasis on our individual responsibility to take action in our political spheres. The final solution is to find common ground with one another and begin making real change in our political entity. Aristotle's ideals act as a reminder that the ultimate purpose of politics is to provide a good life for everyone in the political sphere.

This work is designed to bring the realization that the political entity in the United States is not a competition as we have been treating it. Rather, it is a unified front to create the best life for those who are a part of it.

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INTRODUCTION

Recently, polarization has been a great concern in political communities, especially in the modern media platforms. There are many types of polarization in multiple scholarly fields that have been studied for years. In order to distinguish the type of polarization discussed for this project specifically, we will look at three types of polarization. The first type is social polarization which is defined as, "the widening of a gap between specific subgroups of people in terms of their social circumstances and opportunities" (Chakravarty, 2015). Political polarization is the second type and can be defined as, "the divergence of political attitudes and ideas to the ideological extreme" (BridgeND, 2019). The final type of polarization is the one that will be discussed throughout this text and will be referenced as group polarization.

This type of polarization is the sharp division between groups of individuals. Group polarization is simple compared to the previous two, but there are specific reasons as to why this type takes precedent over the other for this project. One reason is that (in comparison to social polarization) this type of polarization as well as this project is not concerned with any social circumstances such as race or ethnicity, income levels, or gender, etc. It is instead concerned with the idea that those from other groups are perceives as polar opposites, and there is a loss of any form of common ground and all that remains is a sharp division. In comparison to political polarization, a distinction needs to be made concerning the issue-at hand for the context of this project. This project is focused on the extremity of the debate and disagreement that these groups conduct, not the views themselves. This extremity is present in the conversations full of impudent attitudes and name-calling instead of constructive conversations with a healthy debate and provide actual solutions we face as a democratic society.

Philosophers have examined and shared their thoughts on many aspects of our society for countless years. Political theory is one that examines the political sphere of our society. From these theories, we are able to see the value of politics and its different aspects. It is through these theories that we see how philosophers believe what a political entity should be. Examining these texts and those that are similar will help us find the value in our politics as well as the value in fixing it. Further, looking at these theories allow us to see the specific issues that group polarization has created for these ideals.

This perspective allows us to gain a deeper insight into not only the issue of group polarization, but also the importance of the political sphere of our society. Attitudes about politics can range from a large variety. Some people's world revolves around politics while others argue that it is a complete waste of time. It is important that we understand that politics as well as the ideals of democracy are necessary for our society. Understanding the issues that group polarization causes does not solve the issue itself. However, it provides us with a step in the right direction. In other words, knowing what these issues are can tell us where and how we can further approach solving this issue of group polarization as a whole. That being said this project found four issues that group polarization causes for specific political theories.

The first issue has to do with Arendt's emphasis on the importance of freedom in the political sphere of our society. In her text, *Between Past and Future*, she states that this freedom is one where individuals can speak and act on behalf of their personal political beliefs without facing consequences for doing so. These consequences do not necessarily mean solely from the political entity themselves. In the texts, #Republic, by Cass R. Sunstein and an article, *Why it's as Hard...*, by C Thi Nguyen social structures caused by and cause the increase in group

polarization. These structures include informational and reputational cascades, echo chambers, and epistemic bubbles. It is through these structures that freedom gets indirectly hindered.

The next issue comes from Kevin Dorst's text, *A Plea for Political Empathy*, and Plato's text, *Statesman*. Dorst shows that one way that group polarization has increased is from how these different groups have dehumanized one another which causes these groups to not only disagree with each other but also despise each other. This then makes it harder for political leaders to unify those of different viewpoints. Sometimes they even engage in this dehumanizing themselves with their fellow political leaders that have opposing viewpoints. Even if they intend to or not, they create an issue in Plato's theory. Plato states that a true political leader must rise above these differences and bring the people of the political community. That being said, what Plato references as "weaving", group polarization has made this almost impossible to do, especially in the case that the political leaders themselves are engaging in dehumanization.

The third issue discusses how the media's role in group polarization has created issues for Arendt's link between truth and politics. Regina Rini first gives us insight into what "fake news" is and the specific ways in which media platforms have played a role in the mass spread of false information, all of which will be further explained in the third section. Arendt states that the relationship between truth and politics is fragile. This begins with the idea that because individuals (especially those who are a part of it) expect political entities to uphold truth, since they play a huge role in the well-being of the community as a whole. The issue lies in the fact that even if political entities are perceived to have failed to meet these expectations, the political entity as a whole can be diminished. Through the spread of false information and the era of fake news, we can see how group polarization has caused distrust towards the political sphere of our society.

The final issue then is more of a broad perspective on the issue. Sunstein and Dorst show that group polarization has caused disharmony as a whole in our society. This may seem obvious after discussing the past three issues that there is something wrong with group polarization. In Aristotle's text, *Politics*, emphasizes that the main purpose of the political sphere of our society is to provide those a part of it with a good life. This good life is one that is characterized by the availability of human flourishing in this community. The disharmony Sunstein and Dorst point out prevent political entities from providing the good life that Aristotle believes they should.

1.   FREEDOM AND ACTION

1.1   Introduction

This issue is presented first, because it provides context for the remainder of this text. The ideals from Sunstein's, *#Republic*, and Arendt's, *Between Past and Future*, highlights different aspects of society that increase group polarization and the ways in which they violate the necessary freedom to act in a political entity. Specifically, in the media, aspects such as informational and reputational cascades as well as echo chambers and epistemic bubbles are those that increase polarization. These aspects then change the way that we converse with others amidst a political debate. The aspects along with the shift in conversations discourage those to engage in their freedom to act that Arendt prioritizes for a political community. The next two paragraphs will discuss the organization of these sections.

As we previously saw, the term polarization can be classified into various specific types. Just like Cass Sunstein, this text uses the specific definition of group polarization that will be further elaborated in the upcoming section. Then, a discussion of informational and reputational cascades will highlight a way in which polarization increases. The next topic of echo chambers and epistemic bubbles comes from the article, *Escaping the Echo Chamber*, displays another way polarization increases through the media. Lastly, there will be a discussion in how combining these aspects have discouraged people from engaging in effective conversations.

The Arendt section first clarifies what freedom is and its importance in the political sphere of our society. For Arendt, to obtain freedom is to obtain the ability to act in a free way without facing consequences for doing so. Freedom is extremely important since it is the ultimate purpose of a political entity. Then, there is a clarification on what action specifically is

as it is not only essential for political spheres but also for human beings as a whole. Finally, there is an overview on these ideals and what they mean as a whole for Arendt's political theory.

1.2   #Republic

As mentioned earlier, the type of polarization that will be focused on throughout this text is group polarization. This can be defined as a definition into two sharply contrasting groups or sets of beliefs. These two groups will only be defined in hypothetical situations to further clarify ideals. There can be connections between those hypothetical groups and partisan groups in democratic societies. It is important to note that when it comes to polarized partisan groups these the hostility we will see become heightened in that the issues they face are more crucial to society.

There are two dichotomies where we see how media increases group polarization. Informational and reputational cascades show how some individuals may conform to new information that then form beliefs. The other dichotomy involves social structures in how some individuals credit or discredit information. The two groups of this dichotomy are echo chambers and epistemic bubbles. Keep in mind that these dichotomies are not only present in social media, but there are also present in all instances of information sharing. Since media platforms have the ability to share information much more rapidly, the effects these dichotomies have are much more detrimental to decreasing group polarization.

An informational cascade is one where people decide to believe things simply because their friends believe such things. An example would be a debate on whether pineapple on pizza is a delicious meal. One individual who has no particular interest in eating a pizza with pineapple and has never even tried such a pizza. Their group of friends believe that a pineapple on pizza is a mistake and not a tasteful meal. This individual will then likely hold this belief and go on to not

only vocalize that belief but also not try pizza with pineapples. Whereas reputational cascades work a bit differently in our society. Those who follow a reputational cascade will choose to believe information simply because the information is too popular to refute. In the pineapple on pizza example, let us say the majority of people in a specific social setting believe that pineapple on pizza is a terrible meal choice. Due to the refutational cascade, an individual a part of this setting may decide to withhold any opposing belief because they are scared of what may consequences are to follow in refuting this statement. Informational and reputational cascades limit individuals from creating their own beliefs. Social media cannot entirely be blamed for this dichotomy. These aspects of supporting beliefs are mainly due to individuals choosing to believe items to avoid any issues.

As previously stated, these aspects are present everywhere, but we are specifically referencing the presence of these aspects in media platforms. Later in the text we will see what Regina Rini refers to as the bent testimony of social media. In regard to informational and reputational cascades, sharing information through media platforms. When our friends share posts, depending on the individual, we make a decision to accept or deny the information within the post. Reputational cascades are more likely in face-to-face situations than those in the media. This is because people are more confidential in sharing controversial ideals on media platforms than in face-to-face situations. This however plays a huge role in the very important freedom of speech we'll see that Arendt emphasizes. These aspects go hand in hand with these next aspects in that they typically come together to increase group polarization.

In the article, *Escape the Echo Chamber*, echo chambers and epistemic bubbles are described as social structures that have contributed to the increase in group polarization in recent years. An epistemic bubble is an exclusion of those opposing voices. It does not matter if an

individual will credit or discredit a voice if they never come across this voice. These aspects are dangerous in that they deepen and strengthen that individual's beliefs. Further, specifically in echo chambers, strengthens group affiliation which then increases group polarization as a whole. An echo chambers the type of structure where an individual comes across opposing voices, however these voices have been discredited solely on the basis of opposing that individual's beliefs. Further, any voice that speaks of opposing viewpoints are deemed false and simply untrustworthy.

An example of echo chambers can be seen in a debate on whether Android or Apple cellular devices are better. An Android user may discuss this debate with other Android users. Someone from the group may say something like "All iPhone users and those who advocate for them are ignorant and cannot be trusted for any reason" during the conversation. This individual may then take this statement and use it as a refutation for any argument that an iPhone user may provide during a debate. This becomes an issue in that it creates hostility and the actual facts of a debate are completely pushed aside. For an epistemic bubble we can reference media platforms specifically and how they operate within them. Platforms have added algorithms to increase enjoyment for their users by constantly providing content that the user tends to prefer. Similar to echo chambers, epistemic bubbles increase group affiliation in that they are not being exposed to opposing groups so their beliefs are continuously being conformed and strengthened.

When looking at all four aspects previously discussed, we can see how they are all related in that they can work together or influence one another all to increase the strong group affiliation that then causes the issue of group polarization to increase as well. For example, informational and reputational cascades typically occur simultaneously and then can lead to epistemic bubbles. This is because you uphold certain beliefs due to the fact that not doing so could have

consequences. Then, seeing friends post can cause algorithms to continuously share similar information. This then creates an epistemic bubble. Finally, within the bubble it is likely within it can create an echo chamber. These chain of events are essential in that they are ways in which group polarization increases.

What does this mean for our conversations? It is through the previously mentioned aspects that beliefs on certain topics are strengthened. Referencing back to the conversation between the Android and the iPhone user example, we can see how the Android user may be more hostile towards the "ignorant and untrustworthy" iPhone user. In these hostile conversations two things may occur. Either the iPhone user brings out an even more hostile attitude towards the Android user or the iPhone user completely disengages with the conversation. This is an issue because there is now a not so friendly connection between the two individuals but further no progress to settling the debate has been made. This issue is then heightened in political group polarization as debates on extremely crucial issues are never acted upon in that no one can agree on anything. Furthermore, disengaging in those important conversations solves nothing and those issues remain in our society.

1.3   Between Past and Future

In the chapter, "What is Freedom?", from Hannah Arendt's text discusses the ultimate purpose of a political community. That purpose is freedom. Specifically, the freedom to act. Freedom is the ability to act in the political community without facing consequences to do so. While action is what it means to be human in consistently improving rather than sitting around until our death. Freedom and action are two aspects of life that make a political entity virtuous and that is the one we should strive for in our society.

The ability to act in a free way without facing consequences to do so has a couple of implications that need to be clarified. First, this idea is to be understood subject to institutionalized laws. It would be wrong to assume that Arendt supports a political entity that contains no laws. These laws, the second implication, can not infringe our freedom and ability to be active in our political community. For example, protests are a way that citizens act freely in that it is their right to engage in that activity within democratic societies. This right is one that Arendt not only supports, but also highly encourages for political entities. The emphasized importance of freedom is due to the fact that Arendt believes that the political community is and should be a sphere of freedom. If we lose freedom, we lose our political community. Before we see the reasons as to why this is so there needs to be a further understanding of action and the relationship it has with freedom.

Action, which Arendt says is largely accomplished through speech, is a gift that encompasses what it means to be a human being. Political action is characterized by participation in public affairs. Every individual within the political sphere of society should actively participate in deliberation and law making. This can range from voting, attending town hall meetings, or joining a committee, etc. For Arendt, being an active participant in the political community is a huge part of what makes us human. One form of political participation that should be highlighted is protesting. It is one that is accomplished through speech and gives us the opportunity to share viewpoints on our political community.

For Arendt, freedom and action work hand-in-hand in that, "to be free and to act are the same" (Arendt 2006). We must then have the freedom to act and let our voices be heard. There are many reasons as to why maintaining freedom and action is very important in our society. One being that political institutions are dependent on acting and free individuals. This is because

acting and free citizens are what created political entities as a whole. Another reason is that action and freedom make our political institution improve. If no men were to act or have the freedom to do so, then the political entity will never improve for the better of the community. Finally, the two aspects add an element of virtuosity which Arendt describes as the excellence we ascribe to politics.

1.4 The Connection

From Sunstein's text, we see how different aspects can prevent people from participating in their political community in the way that Arendt believes they should. Specifically, by keeping things to ourselves or disengaging from conversations about politics, are ways in which we choose not to act and use our freedom. Informational and reputational cascades, echo chambers, and epistemic bubbles hinder us from taking this role in a political community.

Both epistemic bubbles and informational cascades are similar in that they involve the same way in that individuals decide to not take action. These social structures bring up the idea that the specific may or may not be an authentic belief as there is a missing element that could alter one's belief on a particular subject. With a refutational cascade an individual decides not to practice our freedom of speech right. Further, it hinders us from taking action for the betterment of our community as individuals refuse to even consider opposing arguments. Lastly an echo chamber restricts individuals from holding authentic beliefs as we are barred from being open to and respectful of opposing arguments.

That being said, we need to do our best by voicing our true thoughts of attitudes despite what others may say or think. These social structures and the way that they are implicated in our society play a huge role in group polarization. The loss of authentic action in the community and the discouragement of political participation from barred beliefs and information If we continue

to let the aspects that Sunstein and Nguyen mentioned prevent us from engaging in both action

and freedom, then we risk weakening our political entities as a whole.

2.   DEMONIZATION

2.1   Introduction

Political leaders worldwide take on a huge responsibility in being responsible for the lives of so many individuals. With so many individuals, issues are bound to arise within the community. Political leaders take on the challenge of solving these issues for the well-being of everyone. It seems so simple, just make sure everyone is okay. Unfortunately, it is not this simple, especially with society becoming more and more complex. Further, on the topic of group polarization, our political leaders are at odds on how to unify the people.

Kevin Dorst speaks into group polarization and specifically on the demonization of those who do not agree with us. He argues that this demonization is first linked with irrationalism. This irrationalism involves treating and perceiving those we disagree with as irrational. With this irrationalist perception of opposing viewpoints, people then feel justified to demonize those they disagree with. Dorst states that one way to decrease polarization is to restore political empathy between opposers. In Plato's *Statesman*, he explained that the statesman plays a critical role in our political society and has three main aspects. The statesman's main aspects, in Plato's perspective, are timing, good laws, and weaving. These aspects for Plato take a type of expertise that is imperative for a political leader to be considered a true statesman.

2.2   A Plea for Political Empathy

Dorst begins his text with the idea that the issue is not mere polarization, but it is the demonization of one another that is the real issue. It is not the idea that people are divided or share opposing viewpoints. Rather, it is the idea that there is an intolerance and depreciation of those who do not agree with us. The basis of this demonization is in the ways we label those we

disagree with as irrational. When this happens, this then makes it acceptable to not give them respect. It is at this point that people decide to demonize others solely based on their political views.

In an ideal world, everyone would agree on everything without running into any issues. This is unfortunately rarely the case especially in our modern society. Politics aside, we can see how differences can force people to ignore the people themselves and just see the differences. For example, there might be two individuals whom during a conversation realize they are both fans of rival football teams. This creates great hostility especially the week these two rivals go up against each other. Say that in this conversation things escalate, and these individuals are the furthest from a friendship. That right there is the issue that Dorst highlights. It is not the differences themselves, but the hostility towards those who hold those differences.

Dorst states that demonization begins with a link to irrationality with a specific type of belief, the akratic belief. In our society, specifically in politics, we have seen how people and their beliefs can be labeled as "false" or simply "irrational" when referencing opposing arguments. The issue is directed in the idea that these irrational labels are placed on individuals solely on the basis they uphold opposing beliefs. Going back to the rival football team examples, they deem each other as irrational solely because they choose to root for their team's rival. As soon as someone or something is deemed as irrational, it is because that they are irrational that they do not deserve any form of respect. The main issue here is that just because something is not your view, does not mean that individual themselves are being irrational.

The akratic belief is present quite often in our modern society. With quick access to large amount of information, these types of beliefs are more prevalent. This instance of irrationality involves a realization that on a particular debate, "that there the disagreement on this question is

due to irrationality" (Dorst 2020). Once this occurs one of two things may occur. One is that an individual make come to realize that their belief is irrational and will then give up that belief. The other option is not only to maintain the original belief, but to believe that those with the opposing arguments are indeed the irrational ones.

Being an irrational person changes the way an individual is perceived. This perception then makes people feel more than justified to treat irrational individuals as if they are not human beings. This deems it okay to demonize those individuals who are irrational. We have seen demonization in every aspect of our society. In media platforms, one simple post can ignite hundreds of hasty and hostile replies. The demonization is not present in the replies alone, but it is present in the content of these replies. These replies contain stigmas associated with partisan affiliation and even insults not even related to politics. Outside the media, this demonization can be present at any social gathering. With close friends, or acquaintances bringing up politics can be risky. The same hostility previously mentioned can occur and possibly end current and potential friendships.

This issue may seem minimal in the context previously discussed, but the issue can really be seen when you look at it from a different perspective. These hundreds of replies ignite thousands to treat those with opposing viewpoints the same way. As this continues, there is no common ground for those opposers. People consistently not only disagree with one another, but they tear each other down in the process. As Dorst notes, there is no political empathy.

Political empathy, for Dorst, is part of the solution. He highlights that not everyone has to agree but we must learn to ignore those links of irrationality to those we do not share the same views. If we do not view individuals as irrational, there will be no loss of respect and thus no reason to demonize one another. It is important to note that this is not as easy as flipping a switch

and that irrationalism needs to be eliminated entirely. Arguments that do not follow along logically are irrational. In debates on particular beliefs, it can be hard to see the difference irrational arguments and simply opposing arguments. Although political beliefs have higher stakes, fans of a specific sports teams can perceive rival team fans as irrational in that there are no good reasons to support that team. Even hearing specific reasons such as personal ties with no logical fault, fans of sport teams can still only see the difference and is justified through it. Of course, this is more prevalent in political situations in that the debates are more passionate as people are aware of the importance of the political community. Restoring political empathy means so much more than just agreeing to disagree. It is, in my opinion, ignoring all the differences and working together to solve the issues of our society.

2.3   Statesman

In Plato's text, *Statesman*, there is an in-depth explanation of who the statesman is and should be. First, Plato clarifies that it is necessary for human beings to be directed as they are dependent beings. He then states that there are three main aspects of a statesman: timing, good laws, and weaving. The most important aspect for this project, weaving, is the statesman's role of weaving together the different personalities of a political community. These different personalities can derail the harmony within the community, so it is the statesman's job to look past these differences and unify the community.

In order to highlight the need for the statesman, Plato introduces a way to look at ourselves that he refers to as The Myth. This concept entails two separate times in the past. It is not imperative for someone to believe this myth actually occurred, but it is imperative to understand the purpose of the story. The first, the Cronus time, the Gods provided everything for us such as supplies, food, water, etc. There was no need to work for anything as everything was

available to us at any moment. Whereas, in the Zeus time, the Gods decided to not provide everything for us like before. So, human beings were required to do everything for themselves. The political community was then born in order to facilitate the role of directing human beings. This way of reflecting is to help us see that human beings have a need to be directed. Thus, the statesman is the individual who takes on this role.

It is important though to note who exactly the statesman is. The statesman is a one-of-a-kind individual who genuinely cares about everyone in the political community that obtains a natural and unique expertise. This expertise allows the statesman to excel in the three main aspects of the statesman. The first aspect is the excellence in timing. An example Plato uses to clarify this is the idea that a military general knows how to win a war, and a statesman knows when to go to war (Plato 1992). The second aspect is instituting good laws. These good laws are constituted as ones that are consistent with the political community's core values, are good for the majority, and serve as a form of protection against an imperfect statesman. The last aspect, weaving, is the most important to understand for this project.

To understand weaving as a whole, there must first be an understanding of who exactly the statesman has to weave. Plato highlights two personality types to make this aspect of the statesman clearer. These two personalities are the courageous and moderate individuals. The courageous individual is characterized by someone who is brave and wants war. The moderate individuals are the complete opposite in that they are scared and will avoid war at any cost. Similar to Dorst, it is not the differences themselves that are the issues but rather that without the statesman there is little to no harmony between them. This is due to the fact that they can only see and criticize one another through their lens and only when they are being excessive. It is then the goal of the statesman to rise above these differences and create a functional community. The

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idea of weaving is to demonstrate how the statesman has to work to bring together all of the contributing causes for the betterment of the political community.

2.4 The Connection

If the demonization continues to increase, so will group polarization. At one point if the division becomes too wide, it can be extremely difficult for political leaders to close this gap as Plato states they should. Even if they wanted to, polarization has made this role of the statesman more difficult to take on. I note this because sometimes it feels that political leaders are not even interested in getting rid of this sharp division. This is due to the fact that it seems that political leaders are just as divided as we are. In defense to modern political leaders, the population of these democratic societies have increased which further makes this task difficult. However, it is still important for all of our political leaders to actively participate in closing that gap and unifying those a part of the political community to the best of their ability despite any circumstance.

A real-world example I wish to include to highlight this issue is the final question in the United States 2020 Vice-Presidential Debate. Coming from an eighth grader, the candidates were asked, "If our leaders cannot get along, how are the citizens supposed to get along?" in that political leaders are supposed to lead by example. An eighth grader was able to see what Plato saw. They saw that a political leader is supposed to rise above the differences and encourage political empathy. Group polarization has created an issue in Plato's theory by hindering political leaders from being the true statesman the political community deserves.

3.   THE MEDIA

3.1   Introduction

Fake news is a notorious term that has been tossed around not only in our society but in our media platforms. This has played a huge role in increasing the polarization present in democratic societies. During debates we often encounter references of arguments (specifically their sources) from opposing viewpoints as fake news. The damage these two words have caused is astronomical in that they have strengthened the previously mentioned epistemic bubbles and echo chambers. How have they done this? Although they are not the sole reason, media platforms have played an enormous role in the idea of fake news in our society. Media platforms include but are not limited to Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and news-based sources (CBS, CNN, Fox News, etc.). As society becomes more and more technologically advanced, we have gained the ability to share information faster than ever before. This has created many benefits in various ways, but it has also created many issues. In this section there will be an in-depth look in exactly what consequences unintentionally promote group polarization.

First, Rini defines what is exactly meant by the term "fake news" and explains the role social media has played in spreading fake news. She then goes on to discuss the social norms within media platforms that have influenced this role of the media. The concluding argument of this text involves a proposal to decrease this role. Secondly, truth in itself is a tricky subject. Arendt talks about this extensively in her chapter Truth and Politics. She discusses the difference between factual truth and rational truth in order to demonstrate the real truths in life vs what we believe is true. Then, she brings up two ways in which people regard those who have opposite viewpoints on certain beliefs. To conclude the chapter, she highlights how these factors can

create huge issues for the relationship between truth and politics. That being said, when you look at Arendt's ideals it is very clear that fake news and media platforms have played a role in increasing polarization in that it has made it difficult for people to distinguish between truth and falsehood.

One example I will reference to throughout this section is what will call the article example. This example involves an individual coming across an article with the headline "Eating a Large Pizza Once a Day will Add 15 Years to Your Life" on Facebook. In order to provide further context, this article is not from a distinguished health or nutritional source, which is clearly evident for those who choose to read the article as they find no evidence to certify this claim. Also, this article was created and published in order to increase sales at the local pizza parlors. It is important to note that as outrageous as this may seem, articles like these are common to find in media platforms. This example will help to clarify certain ideals that both Rini and Arendt introduce.

3.2   Fake News and Epistemology

First and foremost, Regina Rini clarifies that fake news can only be characterized as, "intentional deception" (Rini 2017). She also states that intentions behind fake news can either be epistemic or financial. To reference the article example, this article can be characterized as fake news as it is intended to deceive others in order to increase sales (financial motive). This however is seldom clear when coming across an article. Although it seems simple, we know that fake news is much more complex especially in the sphere of politics. With pressing issues that are faced in politics it is important for the truth to be shared rather than information that is only meant to deceive being shared.

What does this have to do with media platforms? These platforms advance when they become faster and more efficient in sharing information. That is often believed to be one of their main goals as entities. It can be argued that they cannot be blamed for spreading false information as they are doing exactly what they are created to do. However, this claim is rejected in that it ignores the basic ideal of democracy. The people of these political entities are not able to make true political decisions that they feel would better their community. Although social media platforms are not necessarily subjected to democracy, news-based sources in democratic societies definitely are. Even at that, with social media platforms understanding the role they have in society in general, all media platforms have a responsibility to prevent mass spread of false information.

There is an ideal Rini references as, "the bent testimony of social media" in order to explain the ways in which media platforms increase the effects of mass spread of fake news. The testimony portion of this ideal refers to the topic within the philosophical epistemology field. In the study of the nature of knowledge, testimony is the transfer of knowledge from one person to another. For example, a mother tells his son that it is snowing outside. The son believes that it is snowing solely because his mom told him so. So, the bent testimony in media platforms occurs in two different ways. One being the ambiguity present, and the other being the accessibility of information.

The ambiguity previously mentioned is concerned with these unclear social norms that are present. Rini uses the example of a retweet on Twitter. When it comes to seeing a tweet that a friend has retweeted, you may wonder whether this is their way of endorsing the information or simply sharing the information. A similar thing happens on Facebook, but there is a slight difference. On Facebook when sharing a post, you have the option to add context to make the

intention clearer for your audience. Although it seems like a minor issue, when it comes to the sharing of fake news, this can be detrimental to finding sources to support beliefs. Taking into consideration the roles of testimony, people may feel justified in that a friend is endorsing the article example that they retweeted the article. This individual will then go on to eat a large pizza daily and deem it credible due to the fact that their friend shared it via a retweet.

The second way in which the bent testimony of social media creates issues is the fact that there is little to no barrier for content. Especially at the time of the United States 2016 Presidential election when the term fake news was used countless times. Articles and information were consistently being shared all over media platforms. However, the main issue is that this term was being used as a way to refute arguments of the opposing candidate. This created a large amount of hostility and pinned those of opposing viewpoints against one another. Now, this issue is not as present in media platforms. As platforms have taken measures to warn people of potential unreliable information such as the 2016 Facebook flagging system. In order to fix this issue, Rini has proposed a technique to combat this issue. She believes that media platforms could provide "reputation scores" on certain sources based on other disputed stories that have disputed (Rini 2017). This proposal could be a way where individuals can decide on how they deem this source based on that provided reputation score.

3.3   Between Past and Future

The previously mentioned chapter Truth and Politics from Arendt's text *Between Past and Future* was originally published in the New Yorker in the year of 1967. Then, when Hannah Arendt wrote this text she decided to include the article. This chapter has extreme significance in that it made observations that are very much relevant in today's society. These observations are especially important in the conversation about polarization. This text contains warnings

characterizing the link of truth and politics as a fragile one. This is due to the ideas that Arendt presents such as a distinction between factual truth vs. rational truth.

The next idea concerns how we regard those statements that we do not agree with. These in themselves are difficult to distinguish in everyday conversations. That being said, when it comes to the political sphere it becomes much more difficult to find these distinctions. As we deal with more pressing issues, our passions and emotions make it that even much more difficult. This is the reason why the link between truth and politics is one that we need to be sure is taken care of as it can be dangerous to our political communities as a whole.

3.3.1 Factual Truth vs. Rational Truth

Factual truth is what is actually the truth. For example, the idea of mathematical division is a factual truth. This is something that can and has been proven in the past. If I have twelve marbles and I divide them into groups of three, there will be four separate groups of marbles. This is simply known and cannot be refuted in a rational way. It sounds simple, but this is not always the case. This is extremely rare to find especially in regard to politics, and that is because of the idea of rational truth.

Rational truth can be described as a statement that an individual believes to be and regards as the truth. It is important to note that an individual's rational truth can be a factual truth. An example of this would include someone who regards mathematical division as truth in that their rational truth is a factual truth. As for the opposite, that highlights the entire issue of this distinction. People tend to regard their rational truths as factual ones and refuse to see it any other way. This may not always be the case and it may not always be intentional; however, it is usually difficult for anyone to make this distinction in our society.

Looking back to the article example from earlier, we are going to look at two separate individuals to make this distinction clearer. One individual, Tommy, comes across this article and decides to read through it. Noticing that there is no evidence to prove the claim made in the article, he goes on to believe that this claim is simply untrue and does not eat a large pizza every day. Another individual, Lisa, also comes across this article and decides to read it. Even with no evidence present, she believes the claim and begins eating a large pizza every day. Although here it is clear that Tommy's claim is a factual truth (as well as a rational one) and Lisa's is a rational one, that is not always the case. That there is the issue being highlighted here. Especially in more complex arguments, it is hard to see which truths are factual and which are rational. Further, it is harder to get individuals through their rational truths once there is factual truth available on a particular claim.

3.3.2   Life of a Philosopher vs. Life of a Citizen

Another issue that makes the link between truth and politics so fragile is the idea that how we regard those that hold opposing viewpoints can create greater hostility in factual truths. This issue originates from, "two diametrically opposed ways of life" (Arendt 2006). These two ways are: the life of the philosopher and the life of a citizen. The first one would indicate that they perceive the arguments of opposers as mere opinion. They simply take the agree to disagree approach. Whereas the second one is an individual who regards those arguments as error or deliberate falsehood. It is important to note that this distinction is not on the basis of characteristics, but rather as a mode of thinking in an individual.

Going back to the article example and the added individuals of Tommy and Lisa, we can add further context to clear up this distinction. Let us say that Tommy takes on the life of a citizen, whereas Lisa takes on the life of a philosopher. Also, let us say that Tommy and Lisa

have mutual friends and attend a dinner with a group of friends one night. Somehow in conversation the article example arises, and Tommy and Lisa both share their thoughts on it. When these two separate modes of thinking collide, it is unclear what exactly can happen. The one thing that is certain though is that there will be hostility especially from Tommy to Lisa. It is then up to the group on how the night proceeds. If we have two individuals who both engage in the philosopher lifestyle, then a much calmer experience can be expected. On the other hand, when two individuals share the lifestyle of a citizen, this is where the main issue lies for this distinction.

Seeing that both of these distinctions are difficult to catch in our society are part of the reason the link between truth and politics is fragile. In general, in our society facts and factual truth are in themselves fragile. Along with the increased hostility throughout the years, there is no doubt that this link Arendt discusses is much more fragile. One might question why we should care about factual truth and not disengaging it with politics? Factual truth as well as rational truths inform our political thoughts. They play a role in distinguishing what the role of political entities shall play in our society. One warning Arendt provides aside from the link is that there is no remedy or solution for losing the ability to categorize truth and falsehood. Once this happens in the political sphere of our society, common and factual reality itself is at stake.

3.4   The Connection

To understand the connections between Rini's ideals and Arendt's we will reference this quote from Arendt's text:

> How truth looks in the purely political perspective, from the viewpoint of power, and the question is whether power could and should be checked not only by a constitution, a bill of rights, and by a multiplicity of powers...by something that arises from without, has its source outside the political realm, and is as independent of the wishes and desires of citizens as is the will of the worst tyrant. (Arendt 2006)

The first part of the quote references truth within the political realm and how it can be controlled. It is through a system of documents designed to keep political entities and those a part of them in line with the expectations created for the entity. With this system, factual truth is required and thus makes it difficult for truth to slip through the cracks. However, the second part of the quote references something that does not follow that same system or any system for that matter. This outside source can be helpful in that they do not have to follow that specific system our political entities do. However, this outside source has the freedom to create chaos in our society whether they intend to or not. If chaos arises, this outside source can be the worst tyrant of a political entity.

From Rini's ideas, we see the ways in which the era of fake news and the role media platforms play in it. We also see how the media created greater hostility within the sphere of politics. Lastly, we see how these platforms make Arendt's distinctions harder to know what factual information is and how to regard those of opposing viewpoints. It then becomes clear that perhaps the media may be this tyrant Arendt references. Further, how the media has weakened this already fragile link of truth and politics and has increased polarization.

4.   HARMONY

4.1   Introduction

This final issue is different from those that we have previously discussed. It is different in that it displays both a more broad and optimistic view on the issue of group polarization. This section displays how the disharmony brought from group polarization as a whole creates issues for Aristotle's belief on the overall purpose of a political entity. The specific ways on this broad issue can be seen can include but are not limited to the previous issues.

An outline of this next starts with the description from Aristotle on how the purpose of the political entity is for the sake of living well. The political entity is one that should provide those a part of it a good life. Further, a good life is constituted by the amount of human flourishing present in an individual, or in this case in a community. After this, we see that Sunstein states that group polarization has restricted us from becoming more advanced as change will never occur. For Dorst, as we saw earlier, there is an emphasis on the idea of restoring political empathy with those we disagree with.

4.2   Aristotle

In Aristotle's text, *Politics*, there is a deep analysis of the political sphere in our society and what it should be. As society developed, different areas of our lives developed to meet the different needs of our lives. This began with the household which then developed into the village. Finally, the political entity which Aristotle references as the city. Each of these communities play a critical role in our lives. It is because of the city that the village and household are functional for those who are a part of it.

The household is the community that has the purpose of satisfying our everyday needs. These needs can include either eating a meal or personal hygiene. While the village needs to satisfy needs other than everyday ones as Aristotle describes. Lastly, came the city which can best be described as multiple villages coming together to meet even further needs. The political entity then takes the responsibility of ensuring that villages and households are able to provide those needs to the individuals within them. To put this in a modern context, the household needs are the same as previously mentioned. The village needs are those that we typically see a HOA take over and manage. Lastly, the city is our modern government system that begins with local and leading up to the federal government.

It is also the responsibility of the city to provide those who are a part of it with a good life. For Aristotle, a good life is best described as one that is full of human flourishing for those individuals. It is important for the political entity to work endlessly in order to come for the sake of living well. Aristotle believes that if the entity fails to do so, then the village and household are sure to follow. This is due to the fact that the city helps shape the conditions set in both the village and the household as well as lastly the individual themself. When this happens, human beings will diminish themselves as well.

4.3   Sunstein and Dorst

Sunstein argues that group polarization has had overall many effects on our society. He highlights that society as a whole was built to be diverse. As democratic societies tend to emphasize their openness to diversity in any and all possible ways, individuals are both entitled and encouraged to be different from one another. This means that similar to Dorst, he believes that the differences themselves are not the issue; but it is rather the way in which we approach and deal with these differences that is the issue. Because of this, society has gone off-track from

producing actual solutions to the many issues that are present in our society. Political entities all over the world are consistently challenged with many issues such as abortion rights, gun control laws, health care, and racial equity, etc. It is typically these issues that experience large amounts of group polarization, and it is because of this polarization that these groups can never decide on anything. Never coming to an agreement on particular issues halt us from actually solving these issues. Years and years of debates will continue to restrict us from getting through these issues. Sunstein believes that those who disagree with one another have to find common ground in order to really address these issues.

As previously mentioned, Dorst believes that it is important that we restore political empathy. The way that we do this is to completely let go of the ideals of irrationalism that we typically link with those that we disagree with. Once we let go of these links, the demonization will begin to stop. This then will open the doors to more respectful conversations. These conversations are respectful in that everyone feels that what they say will be listened to as well as acknowledged without any worry of being demonized solely on the basis of their viewpoints. It is important that we respect each other in that they uphold the same respect for others through their beliefs. Especially with political issues, some individuals can be very passionate on particular issues which makes it more difficult to restore as well as maintain the political empathy that Dorst emphasizes. However, it is both this and finding common ground that are the beginning steps to discovering Aristotle's sole purpose of political entities.

4.4 The Connection

The disharmony present in our society that Sunstein and Dorst highlight in their texts display how group polarization has strayed us away from the human flourishing Aristotle believes we must prioritize in the purpose of our political entities. It is important to note that

even if and when decisions are being made there will always be a number of individuals who will be unhappy with the decision. However, there is much more human flourishing in taking action on issues rather than consistently arguing while the effects of the issue are occurring without any plan to actually resolve the issue at hand. The halt in making real change prevents human flourishing for those that are part of the political entity. Further, the demonization of those we disagree with also prevents the political community from flourishing. It is because of group polarization that no progression on those political issues and demonization that democratic societies have failed to provide individuals with the good life that Aristotle emphasizes.

CONCLUSION

While completing this project, I consistently keep thinking back to two common themes that these issues share. These two themes are accountability and respect. This mentioned accountability includes both the accountability of ourselves as well as others. Respect similarly involves demanding respect for ourselves as well as maintaining respect for others. With respect, individuals can then begin to have the effective conversations we saw earlier. These themes are themselves linked with one another in that we must hold ourselves and others accountable for promoting and maintaining respect between those who do not agree with one another.

In the first issue, regarding freedom of speech, we saw how informational and reputational cascades as well as echo chambers and epistemic bubbles indirectly hinders the freedom of speech that Arendt prioritizes in a political community. This is due to the ways in which these four social structures either discourage us from practicing our rights or withhold us from having an authentic voice by excluding information from individuals. The themes are present in two different ways. It is through those social structures that we must make ourselves accountable for not getting stuck in those structures by being open-minded and diversifying where and how we get our information. Whereas for the second theme, we must not only demand respect for our freedom of speech, but we must also respect that freedom of others.

The second issue displays how group polarization has hindered political leaders from playing the role of a true statesman that Plato describes. Whether these leaders want to or not, it is evident to see that they themselves struggle to get along with those they disagree with. From the accountability theme it is clear to see that we must hold both our political leaders accountable for not satisfying the aspect of a statesman that Plato emphasizes; as well as ourselves by

actively participating in the unification to make it easier for our leaders to weave everyone

together. While the respect theme displays how these political leaders must learn to respect their

fellow politicians as well as the people of the political community by rising above differences

and becoming a true statesman.

For the third issue that highlights the role of media platforms and how they create issues

for the link between truth and politics. As Arendt emphasizes, we must ensure that this link

remains intact for the better of the political community. We saw in that section the ways in which

media platforms have weakened this link through group polarization. For the theme of

accountability, it is to hold both media platforms and users accountable for weakening this link.

We must hold media platforms accountable to take responsibility for figuring out ways to

decrease the mass spread of false information. Users must be held accountable for sharing false

information possibly by making them aware of how to recognize uncredible sources. The next

theme is visible in having respect towards those we disagree with and how they approach us.

Whether they take the simple and respectful "agree to disagree" approach or the harsh "no

factual truth" approach.

The final issue is concerned with the evident disharmony within political issues due to

group polarization as a whole. It is from the first three issues that we are able to see how

polarization has prevented us from fulfilling the ultimate purpose of a political entity that

Aristotle describes. These issues have hindered the political community from providing those a

part of it a life of consistent human flourishing. We must then hold ourselves accountable for

attaining this good life Aristotle describes. The second theme lies in the idea that we must

respect this ultimate purpose and what it means for the political community.

This project as a whole was designed to show the scope of the issues that group polarization has on the political community. For further clarification, these issues are not the only ones that are present, and these political theories are the only ones that are relevant to group polarization. We must look at these issues as a step in the right direction. Pointing out these issues opens a pathway to figuring out specific approaches to decreasing the polarization present in our society. Once we do this, the important conversations will occur, and we can work on solving the issues we face together.

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