HANNAH ARENDT

AND

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THE POLITICAL

IN THE MODERN AGE

A Thesis by

David Theodore Koyzis

January 1982

Submitted to Dr. Bernard Zylstra
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Philosophy at

The Institute for Christian Studies
Toronto, Ontario, Canada
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE 1

CHAPTER I: LIFE AND WORK: AN OVERVIEW 4

CHAPTER II: GENERAL PHILOSOPHICAL CONTOURS 9

ARENDT'S PLACE IN THE PHILOSOPHICAL TRADITION 9

PROGRESSION WITHIN HER THOUGHT 12

ONTOLOGICAL CATEGORIES 13

The Vita Activa 16

The Vita Contemplativa 19

OPPOSITION TO "TWO-WORLD" THEORIES 26

VIEW OF HISTORY 30

THE CONCEPT OF MODERNITY 33

CHAPTER III: THE MEANING OF THE POLITICAL 41

COMPONENTS OF THE POLITICAL 42

Action and Speech 42

Power 46

Freedom 49

THE QUESTION OF AUTHORITY AND THE ACT OF FOUNDATION 51

THE SEARCH FOR AN ABSOLUTE 55

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS 60

THE GENERAL SHAPE OF THE POLITICAL 61

CHAPTER IV: THE DECLINE AND FALL OF THE POLITICAL 67

THE NATION-STATE 68
Definition and Development
Positive Political Elements in the Nation-State
Antipolitical Elements of the Nation-State
THE RULE OF THE BOURGEOISIE: LIBERAL CAPITALISM
MARXIST IDEOLOGY
  Common Themes with Bourgeois Liberalism
  Distinctive Characteristics
TOTALITARIANISM
CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION
  HANNAH ARENDT'S CONTRIBUTION
  DEFICIENCIES IN HER CONCEPTION OF THE POLITICAL
BIBLIOGRAPHY
For at least the last two and one half millennia, people have been doing political philosophy. Inherent in this undertaking is the inquiry as to what is political. What differentiates political thought and action from other types of thought and action? The answer to this question has been as varied as those who have tried to answer it. Plato attempted to answer this by constructing his famous ideal state in the *Republic*. Aristotle, building on this foundation, was not so much interested in establishing ideal cities as in classifying types of regimes in an attempt to understand the political developments of ancient Athens and other cities. From this beginning up until our own day, political philosophers have been trying to better comprehend politics and to discover how it fits in with other human activities of a nonpolitical nature. Usually this effort has been seen in terms of a general normative framework within which all human activities are ordered and conceived.

More recently, however, one can detect something of a crisis in political thought reflecting a more general crisis in western civilization. Some have defined the issue as a series of technical matters: how can we use techniques at our disposal to solve modern political problems? Others have seen the issue in terms of an erosion of a traditional consensus and its replacement by a modern but less adequate worldview. Hannah Arendt is one thinker who falls into the latter category. She believes that the crisis of modernity consists generally in the tendency of modern humankind to posit an absolute basis for human life and activity in the world. The more
specific political malaise consists in the gradual decline and demise of
the free public realm and the violation of its autonomy by external elements,
whether these be economic factors or abstract theoretical constructs. The
failure to acknowledge the autonomy of politics and the public realm has
led to the rise of the modern ideologies which have done so much harm in
recent years. Arendt defines ideologies as "isms which to the satisfaction
of their adherents can explain everything and every occurrence [sic] by de-
ducing it from a single premise."¹ They assume on the basis of this single
idea "that no experience can teach anything because everything is compre-
hended in [a] consistent process of logical deduction."² This deliberate
denial of experience is a cardinal error on the part of the adherents of
the ideologies. For Hannah Arendt is utterly convinced that the basis of
all human life in the world is the common experience which we share as human
beings in a common world.

In this thesis I intend to examine more closely this theme of the
disappearance of the genuinely political in Arendt's published works. I shall
first give a brief overview of her life and work. Secondly, I shall outline
the basic themes in her philosophy and show how these relate to her political
thought and to the demise of the political. Thirdly, I shall outline the
basic contours of her political thought. Fourthly, I shall trace her account
of the gradual demise of the political in terms of four stages: (1) the nation-
state, (2) the rule of the bourgeoisie, (3) Marxist ideology, and (4) totali-
tarianism. Fifthly and finally, I shall attempt to evaluate her notion of
the political with a view toward understanding her positive contribution
and the weakness in her thought.

2Ibid., p. 470.
Hannah Arendt was a victim of the modern age, one of the uprooted people whose plight became so characteristic of the twentieth century. She had the misfortune to come into a world which had lost a sense of reality and into a society which could not accept her for what she was. Confronted with the unspeakable horrors of totalitarianism and the Holocaust, she spent her life attempting to come to grips not only with these phenomena but with the entire intellectual climate of Europe in whose soil the mass ideologies came to fruition. Although she was not initially concerned with political affairs, she soon felt compelled by the course of events to turn her attention toward such matters. Indeed, she is now best known for her political writings, which are not, to be sure, of a precise, scientific nature, but which, nevertheless, display the profound insights of a sage and a literary style similar to that of an historical novelist.

Born in 1906 in the city of Hanover, Germany, of Jewish parents, Arendt grew up in Königsberg, in the province of East Prussia (now Kaliningrad, U.S.S.R.). Although her parents were largely assimilated, they did not try to hide the fact of their origin—something which their daughter never forgot. Both were involved in the Social Democratic Party, but Hannah Arendt did not inherit her parents' socialist beliefs. One year after the death of her father and with the outbreak of the first World War, the first of the series of displacements that so affected her life occurred. Fearing the advance of the Russians, her mother and she fled to Berlin, where they attempted
to adjust to a new life.

During the late 1920s, Arendt studied at the Universities of Marburg, Freiburg and Heidelberg under Martin Heidegger, Edmund Husserl and Karl Jaspers. Under the supervision of the latter, she wrote her doctoral dissertation, Der Liebesbegriff bei Augustin (The Concept of Love in St. Augustine) in 1928. At this point, she was not particularly concerned with politics, although her return to Berlin in 1931 brought her into contact with the rising tide of antisemitism and with Zionism, a political response to the former. In 1933 Adolf Hitler came to power, and she began to engage in activity on behalf of persecuted groups such as the Zionists and the communists. After a brief imprisonment, she fled Germany and settled eventually in Paris with her mother. Here she was fortunate enough to secure employment with Jewish organizations, and she became involved in aiding refugees whose predicament was less favorable than hers. Here she met and married the historian Heinrich Blücher.

In 1940 the Germans overran France, and all "enemy aliens" were placed in internment camps, including Arendt and her husband. In 1941 they were able to escape and, with her mother, secured visas to go to the United States. During the first years of her American residence, she wrote many articles on the plight of the Jews in Europe and on Zionism. During this time, she first served the Conference on Jewish Relations as research director, then held the position of chief editor for Schocken Books, and then became executive director for Jewish Cultural Reconstruction. In 1951 she published her first major—and some would say her greatest—work, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. In this book, she attempted to trace and account for the elements which came together and crystallized into totalitarianism in Germany and Russia. This she did in terms of three phenomena with which she entitled the three major
sections of her work, viz., antisemitism, imperialism and totalitarianism. In addition, she treated racism, the pan-movements (e.g., pan-Germanism and pan-Slavism), the nation-state, the rule of the bourgeoisie, tribal nationalism, and a variety of other movements and trends which contributed to the "worldless" climate in which totalitarianism arose.

In 1958 she published *The Human Condition,* in which she more systematically set forth the conclusions at which she had arrived while writing her first work. It is a study of the *Vita Activa,* the active life of man in the world. Here she articulated her basic ontological distinctions and set a tone which she maintained in her later works. She began to come to grips with the meaning of the "political" as distinguished from other areas of life, such as the social or economic. This was a theme merely hinted at in her previous book.

With the publication of *On Revolution* in 1963, she turned her attention to her adopted country and its traditions, especially the revolutionary and liberal traditions. She compared the American and French Revolutions and assessed the strengths and weaknesses of each.

Her most controversial book was *Eichmann in Jerusalem,* also published in 1963. First written as a series of articles for *The New Yorker,* she herein presented an account of and her reflections on the trial of Adolf Eichmann for war crimes by the Israeli government. She advanced her famous thesis on the "banality of evil," which many interpreted as a belittling of the monstrosity of the nazi crimes. As a result of her observations, she concluded that evil is a surface phenomenon with no roots of its own.

Her other books include *Between Past and Future,* *Crises of the Republic,* and *The Jew as Pariah,* which are collections of essays on politics and history; *On Violence* (also included in *Crises*); *Men in Dark Times,* a collection of
vignettes on figures who influenced her in some way; and Rahel Varnhagen,12
the biography of a socially prominent Jewess in Germany at the turn of the
last century.

Her final work is The Life of the Mind,13 which she had intended to
be a three-volume sequel to The Human Condition. She was able to complete
the first two volumes, Thinking and Willing, but did not live to write the
final volume, Judging. The first two volumes were published posthumously
in 1978 and were edited by Arendt's close friend and associate, Mary McCarthy.

Hannah Arendt taught at the University of California at Berkeley,
Princeton University, the University of Chicago (1963-67) and the New
School for Social Research in New York City (1967-75). She died suddenly
of a heart attack on 4 December 1975 at the age of 69.

1The following short account of Hannah Arendt's life is dependent upon
the essay by Elisabeth Young-Bruehl in Melvyn A. Hill, ed., Hannah Arendt:
The Recovery of the Public World (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979), and
the introduction by Ron H. Feldman in Hannah Arendt, The Jew as Pariah

2Hannah Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism (New York: Harcourt

3Idem, The Human Condition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press,
1958).


6Idem, "A Reporter at Large: Eichmann in Jerusalem," The New Yorker,
February 16, 1963, pp. 40-113; February 23, 1963, pp. 40-111; March 2, 1963,

7Idem, Between Past and Future (New York: Viking Press, 1961; Penguin


ARENDT'S PLACE IN THE PHILOSOPHICAL TRADITION

One might, at first thought, imagine Hannah Arendt the contemporary of the Greek philosophers whom she constantly seems to engage in heated discussion. But she is not one of the ancients; she is our contemporary and, as such, is very much shaped by the philosophical currents of the day. It is only a slight exaggeration to view the main thrust of Arendt's work as "antiphilosophical," or at least as an attempt to reverse what she sees to be the Socratic rebellion against the polis and the realm of human affairs. Ironically, although she was herself a "thinker," engaged in that solitary activity which requires a withdrawal from the world, she constantly defends the independence of action from thought.

Arendt believes that the trauma of Socrates' death at the hands of the polis produced a sense of betrayal among his followers. Because the polis could not ultimately survive his radical claim to the primacy of philosophy, it felt it must be rid of him first. This led his successors to reject the uncertainty of the realm of human affairs and to further assert the supremacy of the thinker (e.g., Plato's philosopher-king). Thus did they avenge their teacher's death.

A similar course of events occurred in Arendt's life, the decisive event for which was the coming of Hitler to power in Germany. Not only did she see a connection between the intellectual climate of the Continent and the rise of nazism which it helped to prepare, but she was shocked and dismayed by the personal adherence to nazism by many of her academic peers, particularly
Martin Heidegger, her former teacher. As a result, she became disillusioned with academic philosophy and, for a time at least, took up the life of action, whose praises she constantly sang in later years after she had returned to academic life.

Superficially, it might appear that Arendt is to be counted among the ranks of the so-called "neoclassicists," owing to her frequent references to the Greek philosophers, such as Plato and Aristotle. Her thought has been described as an exercise in "Hellenic nostalgia." Despite the fact that she occasionally bemoans the modern reversal of the Platonic hierarchy, she has little use for his notion of transcendent ideas. She believes that all theories which look for meaning behind reality within a transcendent realm tend to foster political absolutism and to encourage the development of ideologies. Thus it is not correct to place her in the same category as Eric Voegelin, for example, who believes that the spirit of modernity consists in a loss of the transcendent.

The tradition into which she most comfortably fits is that of European existentialism. In her opposition to "essentialist" philosophies, i.e., those asserting the priority of the general over the particular, one can detect the influence of her teachers, Martin Heidegger, Edmund Husserl and Karl Jaspers. In an early article, "What is Existenz Philosophy?" written in 1946, she discusses the contributions of existentialism (or Existenz philosophy) and phenomenology. The importance of this article lies in that it illuminates some of the themes that would emerge in her later writings. For example, one sees the beginnings of her notion of worldliness in her discussion of Husserl. She contends that he "sought to reestablish the ancient relation between Being and Thought, which had guaranteed man a home in this world." Since "the modern
feeling of homelessness in the world has always ended up with things torn out of their functional context,"$^5$ Arendt asserts that there is a need to grasp the existence of the concrete particulars within the context of the world itself. This was a task taken up by the Existenz philosophers, beginning with Kierkegaard (and even earlier with Kant), and including Heidegger and Jaspers. It is a problem which Arendt herself has inherited and attempts to come to grips with in her own writings.

Politically, she is very difficult to label, at least in popular terms. She does not fit very well into the typically American conservative-liberal spectrum. Nor can she be considered a liberal or a conservative in the classical sense. Despite her parents' adherence to socialism, Arendt never believed in it. She is neither a Marxist nor a capitalist. In fact, she repudiates capitalism more decisively than she feels Marx does. "I do not share Marx's great enthusiasm about capitalism."$^6$ For her, capitalism is merely a preliminary stage in the decline of the public realm and the political. Capitalism and socialism are not opposites, as is often supposed, but rungs on a ladder leading modern man toward a society in which freedom has ceased to exist.

Many commentators have attempted to categorize Arendt's political thought with some difficulty. Margaret Canovan has pointed out the problems inherent in any attempt to pin her down in terms of left and right.$^7$ Leftists do not appreciate her unqualified defence of private property, nor do they like her elitist view of the polis. Her seeming unconcern for poverty and the so-called "social question" tends to make her suspect among socialists. Nevertheless, rightists cannot be expected to sympathize with her quasi-anarchist notions of the public realm and her dislike of rulership and administration within its
boundaries. Her admiration for Rosa Luxemburg, the modern revolutions, and the student movements of the sixties can hardly endear her to the right. Canovan comes to a tentative conclusion:

If any label at all were to be pinned on her, it could only be 'republican'—not in the sense of the American party, but in the old, eighteenth-century sense of a partisan of public freedom, a companion of men like de Tocqueville, Jefferson and Machiavelli.8

Leroy Cooper has christened Arendt's politics as "pluralistic" because of her attempt to take into account the multidimensional nature of human existence.9 Perhaps another, not altogether inaccurate, label would be "existential politics" or "political existentialism,"10 based as it is upon the self-presentation within the public realm of unique particular individuals whose lives and actions cannot ultimately be generalized.

PROGRESSION WITHIN HER THOUGHT

The development of Arendt's thought has been consistent from the outset and has involved no sudden discontinuities or conversions from one systematic position to another. The nature of this development is a progressive deepening of her reflection in order to take into account different phenomena and events as she becomes aware of them. The manner in which this progression has occurred is quite in keeping with her opposition to essentialist philosophies, in that she has attempted to come to grips with particular events and phenomena and move from thence toward the formulation of general concepts. Accordingly, she is often wont to expand on these concepts or to make further distinctions as some new phenomenon comes to her attention which she had not previously taken into account.
Arendt has also sharpened her terminology and narrowed her definitions during the period of her writings. She frequently assigns to relatively common words new meanings and gives them a place within her philosophical framework. For example, in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, she refers to a number of concepts which, although they would acquire more precise definitions in her later works, were at this point not sufficiently worked out or differentiated from conventional usage.

By the middle of the fifties, Arendt's philosophy had already assumed the contours and shape which would largely characterize it until her death. As early as 1953, in an article called "The Ex-Communists," she sees her ontological categories, such as action, making and thought, beginning to come together in some coherent form. Here, for example, she first asserts the impossibility of "making history" and distinguishes making from action. Although the *Vita Activa*, and particularly action, were her major concern throughout her writings, toward the end of her life she turned her attention toward the contemplative faculties of the mind in order to round out her philosophy. Thus we are left with a relatively complete attempt to come to grips with the world in a systematic way.

**ONTORELOGICAL CATEGORIES**

In order to more fully understand the contours of her political thought, it is first necessary to examine the ontological categories within whose framework the former can be seen. Since much of Arendt's analysis of the current political malaise revolves around the relationship between these categories, an adequate knowledge of the latter is essential.
Arendt sees her own position as one of protest against the mainstream of the philosophical tradition since Plato. In this she is at one with her existentialist mentors. Something within this tradition has failed to come to grips with the fundamental human condition and with reality as we experience it from day to day. It has laid the groundwork for the modern world and man's inability to be at home within it. It is for this reason that she feels she must return to the pre-Socratic Greek experience as a basis for her reflection. This experience was precisely "prephilosophic" and thus more in touch with the way things really are. If we are made aware of this experience, she is certain that we also will come to appreciate the insights of the ancients since these insights correspond closely to our own experience.

Arendt has rooted her ontology in this Greek experience from which she derives her categories. The two fundamental categories of reality are the *Vita Activa* and the *Vita Contemplativa*, or the active life and the contemplative life. They correspond to the pairs of doing and knowing, visible and invisible, body and mind, physical and mental. This very important distinction has been part and parcel, she believes, of the philosophical tradition from the beginning.

The relationship between these two categories is one of hierarchy, but only in a restricted sense. Arendt is strongly critical of all philosophies which view activity as taking place for the sake of contemplation and which see the latter as superior to the former. This is as true of Plato and Aristotle as of later thinkers. For such persons, the active life received its meaning from contemplation. In the Socratic tradition, philosophy was accorded a much higher position than that of "mere" political action within the public realm. Socrates' battle with the polis may have ended in his own personal demise,
but his successors have won the war. History itself seems to have come to
his defence, judging him to have been in the right. The realm of human affairs
has been continually depreciated, and the pure realm of contemplation has
been exalted. Arendt is quite willing to stand alone, pointing the way toward
a rehabilitation of the realm of human affairs and freeing it from the
tutelage of the philosophers. At times, she even seems to go in the opposite
direction and to diminish the significance of contemplation and its place
within reality. At the very least, she wishes to emphasize the inherent
dignity of the *Vita Activa* whose meaning cannot be derived from its relation­ship to the *Vita Contemplativa*. The former does not exist merely to make
the latter possible.

Nevertheless, one can speak of a hierarchy in the sense that the lower
rungs are foundational for the existence of the higher. Without the base
provided by the former the latter would hardly be possible. This is particularly
true of the subcategories within the *Vita Activa* and the *Vita Contemplativa*.
If Arendt is reluctant to posit a hierarchy between the active and contem­plative lives, she is quite willing to do so within these two categories.
Within the *Vita Activa*, she has isolated the activities of labor, work and
action. Similarly, within the *Vita Contemplativa* she discerns the separate
mental activities of thinking, willing and judging. Each of these activities
is "basic because they are autonomous; each of them obeys the laws inherent
in the activity itself."12
The *Vita Activa*

The relationship between the three subcategories within the *Vita Activa* is complex. On the one hand, Arendt is quite willing to admit that work is not possible without the activity of labor and that action, in turn, depends upon both these activities. Labor and work are quite necessary and cannot be altogether dispensed with. Nonetheless, she also sees a hierarchy of importance and worth. As one ascends the rungs of the *Vita Activa*, the more dignified and more "human" is that activity. The laborer, who is at the bottom of the ladder, is bound by his own or by another's physical needs, remaining imprisoned in an ontological Hades. Because of this, Arendt speaks of the laborer as being tied to "necessity." The actor, on the other hand, participates in a fully human life and possesses a dignity and majesty unknown to either the worker or laborer. This will become apparent as we discuss more completely each of these activities.

Following Locke, Arendt makes a distinction between "the labour of our body and work of our hands." Although Locke himself does not elaborate further on this distinction (if indeed he actually intended to make such), it is basic to Arendt's conception. Labor is bound to necessity in that it is subject to the ceaseless processes of life itself, to the repetitive motions of production and consumption, both of which are very closely preceded and followed by the other. It corresponds to the existence of the human species, which knows no end, in sharp contrast to the mortality of individuals, which the species as a whole transcends. Labor produces nothing of lasting value, but serves only the continuity of the life process. Its fruits are quickly consumed so that the life process may go on. Labor is essentially futile and leaves no traces behind. It "concentrates upon nothing but its
own being alive, and remains imprisoned in its metabolism with nature without ever transcending or freeing itself from the recurring cycle of its own functioning."\textsuperscript{14} For this reason, labor was held in contempt by the ancient Greeks, who assigned this activity to their slaves. Labor is the most "natural" of activities. It takes nothing from nature but, on the contrary, acts very much within its cyclical pattern. There is nothing specifically human about labor: the daily struggle to stay alive is something which man shares with the animal world. For Arendt, then, the life of the laborer, or \textit{animal laborans}, is not fully human.\textsuperscript{15}

The activity of labor takes place within the private household, within which force and violence, ruling and being ruled, and general inequality are necessary in order to ensure that the flow of life and nature is maintained. Within the confines of this private household, laboring activities are hidden from the world of appearances and are not fit to be brought into the open and exposed to the light of day. They need not be deliberated upon within a congregation of men; they need only to be administered by the head of the household according to the dictates of necessity. Labor is thus not a political activity and should not be mistaken for the latter. The modern entrance of the \textit{animal laborans} into the public realm is one of the root causes of the modern malaise and figures prominently into Arendt's critique of Marxism.\textsuperscript{16}

A step above labor and distinct from it is the activity of work, also known as \textit{making} or \textit{fabrication}. Whereas labor is a natural activity whose products are quickly consumed, work is a worldly activity whose products are durable. Labor is the result of necessity, while work is prompted by utility. Through fabrication, the worker, or \textit{homo faber}, builds a world—a human artifact—between man and nature. It is in this world of human objects that man
lives his life. These objects are specifically use-objects whose very
durability outlasts the life of any one human being. This is in stark con-
trast to the consumer goods which are bound up with the life process itself.
The human artifice provides a measure of continuity between the generations
and stability for human life, constituting a cushion to protect man from the
harsh realities of nature.

As opposed to labor, which knows no end, work falls within a framework
of means and ends. The craftsman, guided by the idea of that which he wishes
to fabricate, uses selected means and proceeds to execute his work accordingly,
ceasing when his work is completed.

Here it is indeed true that the end justifies the means; it does more,
it produces and organizes them. The end justifies the violence done to
nature to win the material, as the wood justifies killing the tree and
the table justifies destroying the wood.17

By its very nature, fabrication removes something from nature and reshapess it,
rendering it fit for the human artifice, which now retains its own existence
apart from both nature and mankind.

In contrast to both the animal laborans and the man of action, the former
bound to necessity and the latter always limited by the presence of his fellow-
mens, homo faber alone remains master within his own realm. He has mastered
nature, himself and his chosen task. "Alone with his image of the future
product, homo faber is free to produce, and again facing alone the work of
his hands, he is free to destroy."18 It is characteristic of homo faber that
he instrumentalizes the earth and all things which have an existence independent
of humankind and his fabrication. These have no value in themselves save as
potential means for the making of the human world. Thus the fabricator, in his
relationship to the means and ends of his own activity, can uniquely claim to
act "sovereignly."
Work is neither a wholly private nor a wholly public activity. It is performed in solitude, to be sure, but it bears none of the "shame" associated with the lowly pursuits of the *animal laborans*. In one sense, work is a public activity since it creates the common world in which men come together to act. Without the preliminary work of the fabricator in wresting from the grip of nature that space wherein men can meet as equals, the public realm would not be possible. The element of violence which is inherent in all fabrication is frequently necessary for the foundation of a new body politic. Nevertheless work is not a political activity and *homo faber* is not fit for the public realm itself.

The third and highest activity within the *Vita Activa* is action. This will be described in more detail in the next chapter. At this point, we shall be content to say that action, with its corollary *speech*, is the most fully human and political of the three activities of the *Vita Activa*.

*The Vita Contemplativa*

The second major category in Arendt's ontological hierarchy is the *Vita Contemplativa*. Although she is hesitant to assert that it is superior to the *Vita Activa*, she does believe that it at least represents a different way of life subject to its own unique imperatives. The latter in no sense exists merely to make the former possible. It is obvious from this that the relation between the *Vita Activa* and *Vita Contemplativa* is quite different from the relation between labor and action within the former. Arendt is quite explicit in her belief that action is superior to labor in that the latter exists
only to make the former possible. For the head of the household, whose animal needs are taken care of within its confines, is thereby free to participate as a citizen within the public realm. This presupposes a hierarchical relationship between the two activities, something which is not present to the same extent and in the same sense between the contemplative and the active. In any case, Arendt denies that the traditional distinction between the active and contemplative corresponds to that between necessity and freedom. There is no "philosophical household" in which action possesses a mere necessary status and is performed in order to free the thinker so that he may pursue the bios theoretikos. This is a myth created by Socrates' successors in order to vitiate the life of the polis.

In this tradition, where Arendt places both the post-Socratic and christian worldviews, the most salient characteristic of the Vita Contemplativa is its quiet. To the Greeks the purpose of this quiet was philosophizing, and to the Christians it was meditation, but to both it represented a higher way of life than the active. Consequently, the chief quality of the Vita Activa was deemed to be its lack of stillness—the absence of peace. This, of course, meant that the active life was defined in terms of a negative and retained no positive significance of its own. What is significant about this notion of the active life as the lack of quiet is that compared with this stillness all other differences between the various activities in the Vita Activa disappeared. Compared to this quiet, it was no longer important whether you labored and tilled the soil, or worked and produced use-objects, or acted together with others in certain enterprises.\(^{19}\)

In other words, the three subdistinctions seemed insignificant in comparison with the two larger distinctions.

In *The Human Condition*, Arendt sets forth these three subdistinctions
within the *Vita Activa*, and in *The Life of the Mind*, her final work which she did not live to complete, she describes the three subdistinctions within the *Vita Contemplativa*. These are thinking, willing, and judging. Whereas she does not wish to conceive of these activities in a hierarchical order, she nevertheless feels that it is hardly deniable that an order of priorities exists. It is inconceivable how we would ever be able to will or to judge, that is, to handle things which are not yet and things which are no more, if the power of representation and the effort necessary to direct mental attention to what in every way escapes the attention of sense perception had not gone ahead.20

This said, it is also true that the contrast between the mental activities is not nearly as stark as that between the activities of the *Vita Activa*. Moreover, the hierarchical relationship within the *Vita Contemplativa* does not seem to be one of greater and lesser importance.

Let us now turn to the first mental activity, which is thinking. Thinking, by its very nature, involves a withdrawal from the common world in order to engage in this activity by oneself.

For while, for whatever reason, a man indulges in sheer thinking, and no matter on what subject, he lives completely in the singular, that is, in complete solitude, as though not men but Man inhabited the earth.21

By thinking, one engages in that silent dialogue with oneself, which testifies to the duality inherent in all reflection.22 Thinking rests on the ability of the mind to summon before itself that which is "absent from the senses."23 This may be a remembrance of what once was, an anticipation of what is not yet, or the vision of what lies "beyond the realm of all possible imagination."24

Arendt emphasizes that thinking is not the same as *knowing* and that each involves quite different ends. Here she appeals to Kant's distinction between
Vernunft and Verstand, which she translates as reason and intellect respectively. Whereas the modern age has concerned itself almost exclusively with the latter, she believes the former is much more important for her purpose. Verstand rests upon the capacity of man for knowing. It is derived directly from our common sense experience and seeks to understand the world of appearances. It is our cognitive faculty, the chief end of which is the search for truth. Vernunft, on the other hand, rests upon man's capacity for speculative thought. It is withdrawn from the world of appearances and has "de-sensed" reality, converting it into proper "thought objects." It is our reasoning faculty and its end is the quest for meaning.

The crucial difference between the two is that Verstand, as the search for truth and demonstrably verifiable facts, is tied to necessity. "Truth is what we are compelled to admit by the nature either of our senses or of our brain." It is upon Verstand that the whole of the modern scientific enterprise has been based. Against this tradition, Arendt asserts the priority of Vernunft over Verstand—of reason over intellect.

It is more than likely that men, if they were ever to lose the appetite for meaning we call thinking and cease to ask unanswerable questions, would lose not only the ability to produce those thought-things that we call works of art but also the capacity to ask all the answerable questions upon which every civilization is founded. In this sense, reason is the a priori condition of the intellect and of cognition.

There is thus a similarity between action and thinking, in that neither has a specific end and meaning emerges out of the activity itself. Thought is not tied to an object within reality, as is knowing, and is therefore an activity which partakes of freedom.

The second faculty within the Vita Contemplativa is willing, which is "our mental organ for the future." It is to the future what memory is to
the past. It is no longer concerned with mental objects, but with projects. By willing, the mind projects itself into the future, transcending its limitations in the present. Even more than thought, the will partakes of freedom. It is the source of action, the beginning of something new. According to Arendt, the will was unknown to the ancients and did not enter into human consideration until the beginning of the Christian era. This is because the concept of novelty, which the notion of will presupposed, was foreign to the Greek cyclical view of history, in which everything that occurred had a precedent. The will is free, almost by definition, since its very source lies within the mind of man and not in some supposedly pre-existent potentiality. "It is the possibility of resistance to the needs of desire, on the one hand, and the dictates of intellect and reason, on the other, that constitutes human freedom." The will is "indifferent" to necessity and "in its sheer contingent factuality cannot be explained in terms of causality."³⁰

Unlike thought, which is potentially endless, the will is short-lived. It comes into existence the moment a project is brought to mind and ceases to exist when the project begins to be executed. Though the will is the source of action, as soon as action commences, the will ends. The will's freedom, then, does not consist in its ability to do anything, which of course it cannot. Its freedom consists in its ability, as a purely mental faculty, to conceive of any number of alternative actions, each of which is well within the realm of plausibility. The will thus partakes of contingency, an insight contributed by Duns Scotus. This contingency is coexistent with the will itself and, like it, disappears when the project is actualized.

A thing may have happened quite at random, but, once it has come into existence and assumed reality, it loses its aspect of contingency and
presents itself to us in the guise of necessity... Once the contingent has happened, we can no longer unravel the strands that entangled it until it became an event—as though it could still be or not be.\(^3^1\)

The third and last faculty of the mind, judging, is perhaps the most important for Arendt's purpose yet the least fully defined, owing to her untimely death before she was able to complete the final volume of *The Life of the Mind* on this subject. What we are left with are her notes on judging (primarily a commentary on Kant's *Critique of Judgement*), which are published in the form of an appendix to *Willing*,\(^3^2\) and her remarks on the subject in her essay "The Crisis in Culture."\(^3^3\) Through the exercise of this faculty of judging, the universal and the particular come together. Following Kant, she further distinguishes between determinent judgement and reflective judgement. Under the former, "Particulars are subsumed under general rules," whereas the latter

ascends "from the particular...to the universal" by deciding, without any over-all rules, This is beautiful, this is ugly, this is right, this is wrong; and here for a guiding principle, judging "can only give [it] as a law from and to itself."\(^3^4\)

Reflective judgement is the most significant for Arendt, since it is illustrative of the autonomous nature of this faculty.

For this reason, she posits a close connection between judgement and taste, which is an aesthetic faculty. Although it is clearly based in common experience, taste expresses preferences which cannot be understood in terms of general causes. One observes a rose and judges it to be beautiful without access to a universal idea of what beauty is. "I may not know art, but I know what I like," is a common expression which illustrates the nature of taste. Judgement, which always deals with particulars, is thus independent of thinking, which tends to generalize and deals with "invisibles" which are
removed from sense experience. Judgement is always intimately connected with our worldly experience and is based upon common sense, which "fits the sensations of my strictly private five senses--so private that sensations in their mere sensational quality and intensity are incommunicable--into a common world shared by others." It is the commonness of the world we inhabit that saves the faculty of judgement from degenerating into the subjectivity of merely "private feelings."

The fact that judgement is potentially communicable in public prompts Arendt to call it "the most political of man's mental abilities." In contrast to thinking, which consists of that silent dialogue between me and myself, judging depends for its validity on the presence of others. Judging is quite unlike the process of "pure reasoning" in that it rests upon "an anticipated communication with others with whom I know I must finally come to some agreement." Because of this, judgement must transcend the limitations of personal subjectivity in order to take into account a variety of interests and opinions and to incorporate these into a much larger perspective, which can (at least potentially) be agreed upon by the many.

The judging person--as Kant says quite beautifully--can only "woo the consent of everyone else" in the hope of coming to an agreement with him eventually. This "wooing" or persuading corresponds closely to what the Greeks called πειθέω, the convincing and persuading speech which they regarded as the typically political form of people talking with one another.

Speech, as we shall see in the next chapter, is the verbal corollary of action, the political activity par excellence. Speech, being the gentle art of persuasion, makes force unnecessary within the public realm, where judgements are communicated without the judging person appealing to a hypothetical realm of universals which would render his specific judgement compulsory.
OPPOSITION TO "TWO-WORLD" THEORIES

In examining Arendt's ontological hierarchy, one can discern several recurrent themes which run like scarlet threads throughout her writings. These themes stem from her rejection of so-called "two-world" theories which posit the existence of a transcendent world above or behind the immanent world and assign priority to the former. The first of these themes is her contrary assertion of the priority of the particular over the general. The tradition of post-Socratic philosophy has unequivocally proclaimed the triumph of the general over the particular, beginning with Socrates' ill-fated attempt to free the thinker from the uncertainty of the public realm. Plato's doctrine of eternal essences represented only the beginning of a long tradition that would seek to explain or to validate the particular in terms of general or universal ideas. Indeed, it seems to have become the very task of the philosopher to generalize and to look for an essential unity behind the plurality of particulars.

What is so remarkable in all these theories and doctrines is their implicit monism, the claim that behind the obvious multiplicity of the world's appearances and, even more pertinent for our context, behind the obvious plurality of man's faculties and abilities, there must exist a oneness—the old *hen pan*, "the all is one"—either a single source or a single ruler. The mistake made by all such "essentialist" philosophers is to ignore the uniqueness and individuality of particulars in their search for general concepts.

Contrary to this tradition of philosophy, Arendt asserts the priority of the particular over the general, the latter of which is always merely a "mental construction." This has implications for two areas of her thought.

First of all, it means that the autonomy of each of man's activities and
faculties must be recognized. In other words, each cannot be reduced to the other; none can derive its validity from another; and one cannot appeal to a transcendent unity to draw them all together. In short, each faculty and activity finds its own meaning and raison d'être within itself, and not in some hypothetical supramundane realm of universals.

Secondly, Arendt's assertion underlines the uniqueness and unprecedented nature of each individual and of each particular action. This is possible because of the human condition of "natality," i.e., that each birth represents the coming into the world of someone entirely unique, whose life has never been lived before and will never be lived again. This person is characterized by distinction, in that he is different from all others with whom he shares the world. As we shall see in the next chapter, this is true of action as well, each example of which is also novel and unexpected.

The second theme in Arendt's writings is the priority of freedom over truth, a theme not unrelated to the first. Since truth is usually conceived of as a Platonic idea (i.e., the general), and since freedom is something which can be exercised only in the realm of human affairs (i.e., the particular), it is not surprising that Arendt would take this position. Accordingly, she expresses a distrust of truth, if not as a general concept, at least as a standard which is applicable to the realm of human affairs. She constantly reiterates that truth, by its very nature, is coercive.

That truth compels with the force of necessity (anagke), which is far stronger than the force of violence (bia), is an old topos in Greek philosophy, and it is always meant as a compliment to truth that it can compel men with the irresistible force of Necessity.

Truth makes speech unnecessary; for if one has access to truth, then he must proclaim and not persuade—command rather than convince. Truth so conceived can only abrogate human freedom, since it renders the realm of human affairs
subject to necessity.

On the existence of truth itself, Arendt is not altogether clear. She seems to allow for the legitimacy of the pursuit of truth at least within the confines of the faculty of knowing. But her preference for thinking, which searches for meaning, has already been stated. If truth does in fact exist, she feels that we cannot really have access to it, at least not in an absolute way. Here she appeals to Jaspers.

For Jaspers, human freedom is guaranteed by our not having the truth; truth compels, and man can be free only because he does not know the answer to the ultimate questions.45 Truth, then, has no hold over the realm of human affairs. And although it seems to bear some relationship to knowing and to determinant judgement, it is inaccessible to the mental faculties of thinking, reflective judgement and, especially, to the will. It is these three latter faculties, and not the first two, which comprise the Vita Contemplativa. The unknowability—or at least the irrelevancy—of truth within these areas makes human freedom a reality.

The third major theme is the primacy of the world of appearances. Once again, Arendt asserts this against the tradition of philosophy which has occupied itself with the search for a presumed reality behind the world as it is manifest to us. Quite to the contrary, reality consists precisely of the world as it appears to us and as we experience it with our senses. "Being and Appearing coincide."46 Reality, insofar as it exists, is meant to be perceived by someone. The fact that the perceiving subject is himself perceived by another means that he is also an object and thus objectively real. Every living thing possesses an innate "urge to appear"—an urge "to fit itself into the world of appearances by displaying and showing, not its 'inner
self but itself as an individual. This is especially true of human beings.

Consequently, the attempt to separate Being and Appearance and to see the former as somehow antecedent or superior to the latter is ill conceived. She is convinced that

our habitual standards of judgment, so firmly rooted in metaphysical assumptions and prejudices—according to which the essential lies beneath the surface, and the surface is "superficial"—are wrong, that our common conviction that what is inside ourselves, our "inner life," is more relevant to what we "are" than what appears on the outside is an illusion.

This "oldest and most stubborn" of metaphysical fallacies has been given renewed vigor with the rise of modern science. But even the scientist, whose entire work involves attempting to discover underlying causes of phenomena, is forced to admit that "the primacy of appearance is a fact of everyday life." For once a piece of evidence is uncovered, it inexorably presents itself as a new appearance and, as such, takes its place within the world.

At the same time, however, the world of appearances contains within itself semblance which corresponds, on the one hand, to the possibility of errors in perception and, on the other hand, to the subjectivity of the perceiver, whose perspective is always limited. "Semblance is inherent in a world ruled by the twofold law of appearing to a plurality of sensitive creatures each equipped with the faculties of perception." The fact that each of these creatures senses this appearance from a different location in the world and from a different viewpoint means that to some extent semblance is inevitable, even in the midst of appearances. Moreover, the fact that we are earth-bound creatures means that some semblances will refuse to yield in the face of hard evidence to the contrary. For example, the sun will
forever "seem to me" to rise and set, despite the testimony of science that the earth actually revolves in relation to the sun. Although she admits the possibility of semblances, Arendt refuses to accept the radical subjectivity of solipsism, which is "out of tune with the most elementary data of our existence and experience." The world does indeed have an objective reality which is guaranteed by a threefold commonness:

the five senses, utterly different from each other, have the same object in common; members of the same species have the context in common that endows every single object with its particular meaning; and all other sense-endowed beings, though perceiving this object from utterly different perspectives, agree on its identity. Out of this threefold commonness arises the sensation of reality.

Common sense, the so-called "sixth sense," is thus the link between the perceiving subject and the world of appearances. The denial of this common sense, and thus of the real world which we experience, is the beginning of ideological thinking, as we shall see below.

VIEW OF HISTORY

As with the other themes in her thought, Arendt's view of history is defined in terms of a negative—what she does not believe. Since the French Revolution, men have become very historically minded. Out of this cataclysmic event came a new view of history which was previously unknown. History began to be seen as a process, similar in character to that of nature itself. Men began to search for supposedly inexorable "laws" of history in order to discover its hidden mechanics. The precision which was expected from the study of the natural sciences was applied to historical science as well. The figure most representative of this trend was Hegel, who first articulated
this historical consciousness and crystallized it into a coherent philosophy. Through his theory of the thesis-antithesis-synthesis, Hegel brought together the Greek cyclical view and the Christian rectilinear view of time and formulated a dialectical notion of history. Accordingly, he saw all of human history as "one uninterrupted development of the Spirit." 

With this new notion of history as process, single historical events ceased to have any importance and meaning in their own right. It is to this that Arendt objects the most. For now the process itself was seen to bestow meaning and dignity upon these events.

What the concept of process implies is that the concrete and the general, the single thing or event and the universal meaning, have parted company. The process, which alone makes meaningful whatever it happens to carry along, has thus acquired a monopoly of universality and significance. 

This is altogether at variance with the Greek and Roman tradition which held that "the lesson of each event, deed, or occurrence is revealed in and by itself." According to Arendt, the original historians were poets and story-tellers, spinning yarns and relating tales of the heroic deeds performed by brave men of old. In this "Homeric" view of history, no attempt was made to seek underlying causes or patterns in some hypothetical historical process. History was simply the story of events, significant in themselves because they represented the acts of men. It was never imagined that the meaning of these events could come from elsewhere, much less from the sequence of time itself. It is this "earlier" notion of history that Arendt attempts to rehabilitate. Here once again, Arendt has registered her protestation against another two-world theory and, in contrast, wishes to take history and all reality at its "face value."

If history has come to be viewed as a process similar to that of nature
itself (and thus ultimately bound to necessity), an equally pervasive view has gained currency which views history as the product of fabrication. It is now commonly assumed that man "makes" history much as he would a work of art. From the concept of general laws of history, a further step has been taken which identifies such laws with so-called "higher aims" which can be planned in advance. Such a teleological view of history reached its culmination in the theories of Karl Marx, who stands very much in the tradition of Hegel, despite the former's "materialization" of the latter's idealism. History is now conceived to have an end, which is the "product" of man's fabricating activity. Accordingly, any means chosen to accomplish that end are ultimately justified by that end.

Arendt feels that this is a highly problematic notion. "The danger of transforming the unknown and unknowable 'higher aims' into planned and willed intentions was that meaning and meaningfulness were transformed into ends." It is one thing to claim to be able to discern a general meaning in history from the vantage point of hindsight; it is quite another to characterize these as goals which can be consciously pursued. The difference between acting and making (which will be elaborated below) is precisely that the former's course is unpredictable and knows no end whereas the latter falls into a framework of means and ends.

There is a further difficulty with the conception of history as the product of making. If history can be brought into conformity with certain predetermined ends, then history must also have an end in the sense of a final completion of its course. For all fabrication ceases when it has reached its conclusion in the finished product. It was Marx who predicted the end of history with the dawn of the classless society. Such a final
consummation made any further historical development unnecessary and without "purpose."

If one imagines that one can "make history," one cannot escape the consequence that there will be an end to history. Whenever we hear of grandiose aims in politics, such as establishing a new society in which justice will be guaranteed forever, or fighting a war to end all wars or to make the whole world safe for democracy, we are moving in the realm of this kind of thinking.60

No longer does even history or the historical process bestow meaning on particular events. "In the classless society the best mankind can do with history is to forget the whole unhappy affair, whose only purpose was to abolish itself."61 Individual actions and occurrences are no longer meaningful even as part of a general development. They have degenerated into mere means in the fabrication of that eschatological utopia in which history will come to an end.

THE CONCEPT OF MODERNITY

Throughout her writings, Arendt speaks continually of the "modern age." This is not merely an arbitrary designation for a certain stretch of time within which we happen to live. For her (as for others who use the concept of modernity), it is a different way of seeing reality—a new worldview which takes hold of the human heart, radically changing the way men live and work in the world. Although it is not a very finely tuned concept, one at least understands that it represents a negative development in human history. The exact chronological boundaries of the modern age are extremely flexible. Arendt lists three events which heralded its beginning: the discovery of America, the Reformation, and the development of a universal science.62
Thus one might try to pin-point its rise to around A.D. 1500. But she speaks just as often of the rise of Socratic philosophy in Athens as another (if not the) precursor to the modern age. In addition, she assigns Christianity a role in its development. If the modern age is only five-hundred years old, its roots can at least be traced to ancient Greece and Rome.

The concept of modernity frequently presupposes the existence of a bygone "golden age" in which matters were, if not perfect, at least generally as they should be. Often this takes the form of a sort of "prehistory," a static reality, the movement away from which has heralded a loss of innocence and the start of something more destructive. For Arendt, such an era was the heroic "Homeric" age, in which men of renown performed great deeds and acted for the sake of glory. It was an age in which men sought the immortality that would be bestowed upon them by anamnesis, the calling-to-mind of their famous actions by the poets and storytellers. This age came to a brief but spectacular climax in the Periclean epoch, when the polis institutionalized the human capacity for action, giving these great deeds a permanent home in the world. Just as quickly as it came into being, the polis disappeared when Socratic and Platonic philosophy asserted its supremacy over human affairs. A series of tyrants, wars and, finally, Alexander's empire put an end to this glorious attempt at the genuine public realm. Things have not been the same since.

Although there are many factors which figure in Arendt's analysis of the modern age, one can discern three main ones which are especially important. The first of these is the alienation from the world. In Arendt's view, "worldliness" is a primary characteristic of the human condition. It
corresponds to the fact that man is very much a part of the world—it is his home and it provides the context in which all his activities take place. Through his senses (particularly his "sixth sense," common sense), he is intimately in touch with the world and is conscious of his own special place within it. It is the removal of this sense of worldliness which came to the fore with the rise of modernity.

At the beginning of this era, a process started by which that world alienation occurred. It was accompanied by the expropriation of the individual and the original accumulation of wealth. She sees this development occurring in terms of three stages. In the first stage, during the period of antiquity, people were members of families, each of which had its own private property. This property was a piece of the earth which the household could identify as its own and in which it was secure. Each person was close to his immediate surroundings and knew his own place. Within easy reach lay the public realm—that space where the heads of families came together, not as subjects organized under the sovereignty of a ruler, but as equals committed to action and the maintenance of the common human artifice.

In the second stage, the nation began to take the place of the family and the nation's territory became a substitute for private property. Men became part of a mass which could be organized only as a giant household. As the geographical scope of his "ownership" (not personal, but as part of society) expanded, the more remote it became from him. He was torn from his immediate environment and cast adrift, membership in the nation being his only compensation.

In the third stage, roughly corresponding to the twentieth century, mankind as a whole has become a substitute for the more limited community of
the nation, and the earth has replaced the latter's territory, thus completing man's alienation from the world. With each expansion of the human community and its habitable space, the smaller the world becomes and the less secure is man's place within it.63

There is, of course, a huge gap of some two millennia between the first and second stages, in which the forces of worldlessness have had a chance to prepare the ground for the modern age and its typical mentality. Two of these forces are, as we have mentioned, post-Socratic philosophy and the Christian religion. Both of these, Arendt feels, have tended to encourage an otherworldly or an innerworldly attitude, which has denigrated our concrete experience in the world in favor of a transcendent realm of ideas accessible to contemplation or of an eternal realm accessible to meditation.

The second major factor in the dawn of the modern age is the rise of "Cartesian doubt" and the loss of common sense. This is a variant of worldlessness, to be sure, but it is specifically the consequence of the revolutionary discoveries of modern science since the seventeenth century. The transformation of natural science into "universal science" removed the data of investigation one step further from man's sense experience by transcending the limitations of the earth and adopting a cosmic standpoint outside of its boundaries.64 Since man's senses were not able to take into account this new viewpoint, man began to doubt "the truth-revealing capacity of the senses."65 That which he always assumed to be true by the testimony of his common sense was now constantly being called into question with each new revelation. Science seemed to demonstrate that our worldly experience was "a constant source of error and delusion."66

It was in such an atmosphere that Descartes first articulated his famous
de omnibus dubitandum est, which has remained the basis of modern philosophical reflection to the present day. "The fundamental experience underlying Cartesian doubt was the discovery that the earth, contrary to all direct sense experience, revolves around the sun." The trauma which this discovery produced made plausible the radical subjectivism proposed by Descartes. For the first time, solipsistic theories gained a hearing among persons who began to believe that perhaps all appearances were mere semblances and that everything outside of oneself possessed no objective reality. This only served to increase the general mood of worldlessness by placing a distance between man and his immediate experience and causing him to doubt his common sense which had formerly assured him of its reality.

The third factor in the rise of the modern age was the blurring of the distinctions between the autonomous activities and faculties of man. This, of course, we have already mentioned briefly and shall have ample occasion to discuss below, since it is one of the most important factors in her argument concerning the eclipse of the political and the ascendancy of the social.


2The differences are brought out in Voegelin's review of The Origins of Totalitarianism in The Review of Politics 15 (January 1953), pp. 68-76; the reply by Arendt, pp. 76-84; and the concluding remark by Voegelin, pp. 84-5.

3The Partisan Review 13 (Winter 1946);34-56.

4Ibid. p. 35.

5Ibid.
6Hill, Hannah Arendt, p. 334.


8Canovan, p. 15.


12Arendt, Thinking, p. 70.

13Human Condition, p. 79.

14Ibid., p. 115.

15Ibid., p. 176; but cf. p. 10.

16See discussion of Marx and Marxism below, pp. 95ff.


18Ibid., p. 144.

19Thinking, p. 7.

20Ibid., p. 76.

21Ibid., p. 47.

22Ibid., p. 74.

23Ibid., p. 76.

24Ibid., p. 77.

25Ibid., p. 61.

26Ibid., p. 62.

27It is interesting to note that, while knowing is definitely a mental activity, Arendt declines to place it within her Vita Contemplativa, thereby diminishing the significance of an activity which she feels has represented the very heart of contemplation for the modern age.

28Willing, p. 13.
51 Ibid., p. 38. Appearance is twofold in the sense that it has the "double function of concealing some interior and revealing some 'surface'—for instance of concealing fear and revealing courage, that is, hiding the fear by showing courage." (p. 37)

52 Ibid., p. 46.
53 Ibid., p. 50.
54 Between, p. 75.
55 Ibid., p. 64.
56 Ibid.
57 Ibid., p. 77.
58 See below, pp. 95ff, for a fuller discussion of Marx.
59 Between, p. 78.
60 Ibid., p. 79.
61 Ibid., pp. 79-80.
62 Human Condition, p. 248.
63 Ibid., pp. 248-257.
64 Ibid., pp. 268ff.
65 Between, p. 54.
66 Ibid., p. 55.
67 Ibid., p. 54.
CHAPTER III
THE MEANING OF THE POLITICAL

We have seen that Hannah Arendt's ontology is based upon the primary
distinction between the Vita Activa and the Vita Contemplativa, and upon
the further distinctions of labor, work and action within the Vita Activa,
and of thinking, willing and judging within the Vita Contemplativa. The
tendency of the modern age to confuse these categories and to blur the
boundaries between them is a primary characteristic of that peculiarly modern
malaise that has settled upon the affairs of men. Each of these categories
is, in her conception, relatively "water-tight" and should remain thus.
Trouble arises when one of these categories begins to take on the specific
content and characteristics of another, or when that which is peculiar to
one sphere spills into another and violates the autonomy of that other
sphere.

Especially relevant to our discussion is the plight of the political
in the modern age. Arendt is convinced that there has occurred a gradual
disappearance of the genuinely "political" because the unique content of
the public realm (wherein resides the political) has been usurped by that
which properly belongs within the private realm. In other words, action
has been replaced variously with work or labor, making the public realm
into a replica of the private. This is inextricably tied to the rise of
the modern ideologies which we shall discuss in the next chapter.

Because Arendt's thought can be seen to revolve around the theme of
the disappearance of the genuinely political in the modern age, it is nec-
necessary that we briefly explore exactly what she means by the political and its specific nature and characteristics. Her conception of the political is not derived from any specific philosophy, but from her perception of the nature of the ancient Greek polis. The polis represents for her the most perfect realization of the public realm, and the trend since that time away from the polis is nothing less than the gradual erosion of the political and its replacement by what she refers to as the "social." Within the polis, men meet as equals, free from the processes of natural life. There men are free by virtue of their dominion over a household, whose members labor to liberate the former from the animal needs and to enable them to enter the public realm. In this realm there exists neither ruling nor being ruled. Violence and force are banished from its space. It is the political realm, within which men are free to participate in action and speech, the two primary distinguishing characteristics of this realm.

COMPONENTS OF THE POLITICAL

Action and Speech

To more fully understand the political, it is first necessary to discuss those activities that are quintessentially political, viz., action and speech, which always appear together. If labor and work are the activities most characteristic of the private realm of the household, action and speech are the activities which distinguish the public realm. Acting and speaking are not separate and can be viewed merely as two distinct aspects of the same activity. For by means of these, the acting and speaking
agent reveals himself in the company of his fellows. They are self-revelatory activities, as distinct from labor, which requires no human individuality or distinctiveness, and from work, which draws attention to the product of fabrication rather than to the fabricator himself. By acting and speaking, men appear *qua* men on the public stage which is the world of appearances. It is in fact the only activity which sets men apart from the animal world as distinctively human. One cannot refrain from it and yet remain human. "A life without speech and without action...is literally dead to the world; it has ceased to be a human life because it is no longer lived among men."1

The life of action is characterized by both individuality and plurality. By acting, the agent reveals who he "really and inexchangeably" is.2 In other words, he demonstrates that he is a unique human being who is like no other. "In acting and speaking, men show who they are, reveal actively their unique personal identities and thus make their appearance in the human world."3 In so doing, they take part in what the ancient Greeks called "glory," i.e., that which attended the heroes of the Homeric epics as they performed their great deeds. At the same time, action cannot take place except in the context of plurality. One cannot act by himself. "To be isolated is to be deprived of the capacity to act."4 The revelation of the agent which is inherent in action requires the presence of others. The character of action as the initiation of something new also necessitates the co-operation of many fellow human beings who, as equals, share in the affairs of the public realm. For the person who attempts to act alone, i.e., as though he were "sovereign," will find that he can do so only by dominating the others within the public realm. At this point, however, they cease to
be his equals, and the authentic public realm has vanished. Thus the tyrannical state knows no real public realm, since the tyrant has no equals. He has annihilated the public realm by making it into a facsimile of the household where domination and violence hold sway.5

The temptation to compensate for the intrinsic weakness of plurality by dominating the public realm is always great, and history has many examples of this. How then is it possible to convince one's fellows to participate in a new initiative without forcing them against their will? In other words, how can one do that which the public realm calls for without destroying the public realm itself? Arendt offers the concept of speech as the solution to this dilemma and as the necessary corollary to action. The art of persuasion was one highly esteemed among the ancient Greeks, since it renders the use of violence and force unnecessary. The polis was the space in which opinions were discussed and tested according to their merits by one's peers, thus excluding the possibility of mass opinion being imposed from above. If one were particularly skilled in the rhetorical art, he would be able to convince a greater number of people to follow his course of action rather than another's. Co-operation would thus be secured verbally and not violently, and the public realm would remain, not merely intact, but healthy.

Action is, first and foremost, the initiation of something new. It corresponds to the human condition of natality, i.e., that birth brings about the beginning of a new human being--of a new life that is unprecedented, unrepeatable and singularly unique. This fact of natality guarantees the possibility of initiating action, which is also unpredictable and unique, at least from the vantage point of necessity. Whereas the ends of
labor—the maintenance of man's species needs—and of work—the fabrication of the human artifice—are entirely predictable and are constantly repeated, the results of action cannot be known beforehand. Indeed, action cannot be placed within the framework of means and ends at all. It knows a beginning but no end. Action sets into motion processes which, like natural processes, do not come to a final conclusion but whose course, unlike natural processes, cannot be foretold.

While the strength of the production process is entirely absorbed in and exhausted by the end product, the strength of the action process is never exhausted in a single deed but, on the contrary, can grow while its consequences multiply... The process of a single deed can quite literally endure throughout time until mankind itself has come to an end.®

Because of its unprecedented nature, action always partakes of the extraordinary. It reaches beyond the routine and into the unexpected. It cannot be judged by its outcome but only by the performance itself. There is more than an incidental resemblance here between action and the theatre arts. One must judge action "only by the criterion of greatness," and not by conventional "moral standards" which apply to ordinary behavior. This can be seen in Machiavelli's concept of *virtu*, from which we derive our word "virtuosity." The latter is an excellence we attribute to the performing arts (as distinguished from the creative arts of making), where the accomplishment lies in the performance itself and not in an end product which outlasts the activity that brought it into existence and becomes independent of it. The virtuoso-ship of Machiavelli's *virtu* somehow reminds us of the fact, although Machiavelli hardly knew it, that the Greeks always used such metaphors as flute-playing, dancing, healing, and seafaring to distinguish political from other activities, that is, that they drew their analogies from those arts in which virtuosity of performance is decisive.®

In action, motives and goals are irrelevant, since these are hidden from
the world of appearances; it is the act itself which is important. The polis, therefore, is the institutionalization of the exceptional. It provides the space in which men can perform great deeds. When it disappears, so does the possibility of greatness.

**Power**

Without the public realm to provide the context, action is not possible, because the latter needs a permanent home in the world to guarantee its continued existence. Similarly, the public realm cannot remain in existence without power. Arendt uses the word "power" in a quite specific sense. It is not synonymous with force or strength, as the tradition has often held. Indeed it has nothing in common with the latter. Each term refers to quite different phenomena. Whereas force and violence are prepolitical phenomena which have no place within the public realm, power is a most political of qualities, bridging the gap between action and the human condition of plurality. In contrast to force, power cannot be used to subjugate a people by superior means of violence. And unlike strength, which resides in the single individual, power can only come into existence "when men join themselves together for the purpose of action, and it will disappear when, for whatever reason, they disperse and desert one another." 9 Whenever men gather as equals to constitute the public realm they create power. Power rests with the people, not with those who would attempt to rule the people. As we have seen, the attempt to dominate the public realm is a vain endeavor, since it can only bring about the latter's demise. Similarly, the attempt to subjugate by means of violence can only destroy genuine power, which
partakes fully in the "frailty of human affairs." On the other hand, however, history does contain examples where people coming together have created an almost irresistible power which has overwhelmed a ruler possessing superior material means of violence. Where the public realm is alive and thriving, power can overcome violence. That this is not a very common occurrence only serves to emphasize the "frailty of human affairs" (i.e., the fragility of the genuine public realm) and to underline the extraordinary and unpredictable nature of action.

One of the advantages of defining power in this manner, according to Arendt, is that it accounts for a number of peculiarities which other more conventional theories are at a loss to explain. First of all, by differentiating between power and authority, one avoids falling into the trap of asserting that (potentially absolute) authority originates in the will of the people or in the nation as a whole. History has shown that the will of the people (Rousseau's volonté générale) can be quite capricious, often disregarding the legal limitations which exist to ensure the continued health of the public realm. The ancients' well-known fear of democracy has been frequently justified. But by locating the source of authority and the origin of power in different places, Arendt believes that she has laid the foundation for a political theory which can provide for popular participation and yet prevent the people from exercising their power arbitrarily.

Secondly, by distinguishing between power and force (the latter of which always depends upon means of violence), she feels she can better account for that remarkable principle developed by Montesquieu, viz., the "division of powers" or "balance of powers." In conventional usage, power and force
are often identified. But if power is indeed that which the ruler exercises over his subjects (by implied threat of the sword), then one can hardly wish that this capacity be divided, much less balanced, among possibly competing factions. Such a state of affairs could only result in the *bellum omnium contra omnes*. Indeed, if one conceives of the state as an enlarged household in which rulership is an essential factor, then it is impossible not to conclude that a single sovereign is necessary (whether that be an absolute monarch or the nation as a whole) and that, therefore, power is indivisible. One is left with no alternative but the highly centralized unitary nation-state. Secondly, the presence of other power centres acts as a check on the expansive tendencies of a single power centre without causing that power to decrease.

Power can be stopped and still be kept intact only by power, so that the principle of the separation of power not only provides a guarantee against the monopolization of power by one part of the government, but actually provides a kind of mechanism, built into the very heart of government, through which new power is constantly generated, without, however, being able to overgrow and expand to the detriment of other centers or sources of power.\(^\text{12}\)

These checks and balances were, of course, an important aspect of the American experiment in constitutionalism. Accordingly, Arendt asserts that what concerned the founding fathers was not so much "how to limit power but how to establish it."\(^\text{13}\) The division and balance of powers was the best way to ensure the continued existence of power and, consequently, of the public space itself, outside of which no genuine freedom is possible.
Let us return now to Arendt's concept of freedom. It is one of the peculiarities of her thought that she takes common words out of general usage, gives them new meanings, and finds a new place for them within the contours of her philosophy, as we have seen. She does this in such a way, however, that the new meaning is quite plausible and bears at least some affinity with the conventional usage. We have all heard, for example, that power rightly belongs to the people, whether or not we believe it to be true or even desirable. Arendt has taken this notion and given it her own special twist. She has done the same with freedom as well.

Because of the all-pervasive influence of the Lockean tradition in Anglo-Saxon culture, we are inclined to view freedom as the absence of restraint. This is especially true of that brand of liberalism which Arendt calls the "rule of the bourgeoisie," a concept which will be explained in more detail below. Freedom, in this tradition, has always been, first and foremost, a freedom from something, whether this be tyranny, insecurity, or—and this is most important for Arendt's purposes—the "burden" of public affairs.

We have seen above that the primacy of freedom is one of the principal motifs in Arendt's thought. Freedom is not just an inner metaphysical faculty, something into which men can retreat as a shelter from external coercion or from the outside world. On the contrary, it is part and parcel of the very world which we hold in common. Whereas the liberation from necessity is essentially prepolitical in nature (possibly requiring violence for its accomplishment\(^{14}\)), freedom is coextensive with the political realm. "Without
a politically guaranteed public realm, freedom lacks the worldly space to make its appearance." The task of the political realm is not to protect the freedom of matters native to the private realm, but to make possible the very appearance of freedom in the public realm itself.

For Arendt, then, freedom is primarily positive in nature and is identical with political participation. On this issue, at least, she would side with Rousseau over Locke—with positive over negative freedom. To be able to act in the company of one's equals in the public realm is the essence of freedom. "Men are free...as long as they act, neither before nor after; for to be free and to act are the same." Those who despise the affairs of men and who regret the human condition of plurality and its "intrinsic weakness" have abandoned the possibility of being free. The isolated individual cannot act; he can only behave according to the dictates of necessity. In his vain attempts to become "sovereign"—i.e., to be totally self-sufficient and to master one's life—he continually runs up against the fact that "not one man, but men, inhabit the earth." This limiting factor means that co-operation is necessary to the performance of action. Thus freedom is only possible in the company of one's fellows.

Only within the public realm can authentic choices be exercised, "which transcend the objective and demonstrably valid opinions of experts." The activities of labor and work, on the other hand, can never be free, since they are governed by predetermined ends which are known and planned in advance. Their respective courses are bound to necessity, since the path taken and the means utilized in their accomplishment are strictly limited by the goals pursued. Any "choices" to be made will be done by experts thoroughly acquainted with the patterns inherent in the activities themselves.
In the public realm, however, freedom is possible because action is not bound within a system of causality. By its very nature, one cannot point to antecedent events which might be said to determine a particular action. It is as unprecedented and unpredictable as the birth of any one human being. It interrupts the normal flow of everyday life and inserts something new.

If it is true that action and beginning are essentially the same, it follows that a capacity for performing miracles must likewise be within the range of human faculties. This sounds stranger than it actually is. It is in the very nature of every new beginning that it breaks into the world as an "infinite improbability," and yet it is precisely this infinitely improbable which actually constitutes the very texture of everything we call real.²⁰

This possibility of performing that which is "infinitely improbable" makes the freedom inherent in action a living reality.

**THE QUESTION OF AUTHORITY AND THE ACT OF FOUNDATION**

If action, speech, power and freedom are the basic characteristics of the political, what place does the concept of authority have among these? What provides the base upon which the public realm is built, and what confers legitimacy upon the law? Arendt realizes that a firm anchor is necessary in order to stabilize the body politic and to check the potentially limitless character of action. Many theorists have located such an authority in the divine commandments of God or in a transcendent or natural law. Arendt appeals, not to another "realm," but to a singular event in the past to which men of the present are the heirs. This event is the *act of foundation*, the act of beginning a new body politic.
In appealing to this foundational act, Arendt's conclusions bear some resemblance to those of the liberal contractarian theorists, such as Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau. But unlike the latter, who appeal to the original contract as the source of political society in general, Arendt speaks of specific bodies politic which have their genesis in a cataclysmic event initiated by the free action of men. This can be seen in the revolutions of the eighteenth century, especially the French and American Revolutions, the original aim of which was the foundation of a space of public freedom in which men could come together to act.

As a basis for this notion of foundation, Arendt appeals not to Greek but to Roman antiquity, with its foundation legends. The founders of the city of Rome provided the source of authority to which their successors would bind themselves. Whereas the task of the former was indeed to begin, to initiate something new, to posit a principium for the body politic, the task of the latter was to conserve and augment the state in accordance with the authority inherent in that previous act of foundation. This act was taken up by the Senate of the Roman Republic, in whose members the spirit of the founders continued to live.²¹

This act of foundation is a singular act which, like all action, carries with it "a measure of complete arbitrariness."²² It does not fit into a process of cause and effect, contrary to the interpretation of contemporary historiography. By its very nature, such an act breaks into history in an unpredictable, unheralded manner which seems to have "abolished the sequence of temporality itself."²³ From whence it has come and whither it will go cannot be known either by the initiator or by the observer. This
was the case with the great revolutions of the eighteenth century, the most successful of which she believes to have been the American.

The "founding fathers" of the American Republic very consciously reached into the Roman past to discover not only a precedent to their own initiating activity, but a source for the authority of the new state (of which more will be said below). This authority became embodied in the written constitution, which was deliberately made amenable to further augmentation through the amendment process. It is often believed that the authority behind the laws rests in the document itself. On the contrary, Arendt asserts that the authority exists not in the piece of paper, but in the very act by which the new body politic was constituted.24

The act of foundation rests upon the capacity of men to make and keep promises, which is perhaps the highest human faculty, politically speaking.25 Without such a capacity, there could be neither a permanent public realm nor laws upon which to build it. Human action would be totally capricious, setting into motion processes which could not be controlled. The making of promises serves as a remedy for the unpredictability of human affairs. It has the effect of setting up "islands of security" in the vast "ocean of uncertainty" as a means of guaranteeing continuity in the realm of human affairs.26 The making of promises is the only "political" way of rendering action less unpredictable.27

This faculty of making and keeping promises is most evident in mutual contracts made by men with each other for the foundation of bodies politic, particularly the puritan covenants drawn up by the early settlers of New England, which in turn formed the basis of the new republic after the Rev-
olution. For Arendt, there is a qualitative difference between her theory of the mutual contract and the prevalent social contract theories. Indeed, the latter does not involve promise of any kind, merely consent. A group of isolated individuals agrees to yield up to a higher authority a certain amount (or all) of the power which they possess in order to be ruled. This they do in exchange for protection from the state of nature and its "inconveniencies." Such a contract in no way changes the old pattern of ruling and being ruled; it only introduces the concept of consent of the governed to the government, which presumably confers legitimacy upon the latter. But the decisive point for Arendt is that, under the social contract, men have forfeited their right to action and have lost the capacity to make promises. They have surrendered public happiness in exchange for private security.

The mutual contract, on the other hand, is not only a result of the free action of men; it also maintains the possibility of continued action by constituting that permanent public space within which this can occur. In so coming together and binding themselves by mutual promise, they do not surrender their power to a higher authority. In fact, they create power, which, as we have seen above, cannot be alienated from the people, since by definition it is dependent upon the "human condition of plurality." Power maintains the existence of the public realm, within which men retain their essential equality and their prerogative to act.
THE SEARCH FOR AN ABSOLUTE

For Arendt, the act of foundation provides the answer to the ancient question of the source of authority for the body politic. How is it possible to provide a firm foundation and a steady anchor for the maintenance of a stable body politic without imposing that levelling conformity from above? What, in addition, guarantees the validity of the law within the body politic in the absence of rulership? It is on this issue that her thought differs markedly from the older divine ordinance or natural law traditions.

On this issue as well, one can detect a certain change in her thought. In *The Origins of Totalitarianism* she is relatively positive toward the stability of natural law conceptions.

By lawful government we understand a body politic in which positive laws are needed to translate and realize the immutable *ius naturale* or the eternal commandments of God into standards of right and wrong. Only in these standards, in the body of positive laws of each country, do the *ius naturale* or the Commandments of God achieve their political reality. 31

This she compares to the totalitarian notion of law as perpetual movement for which man is the only authority. 32 However, by the time she has written the article, "What is Authority" 33 and *On Revolution*, she has clearly rejected the natural law tradition, having come to believe that there is a greater danger in the conception of law as dependent for its validity upon an extra-political (much less a transcendent) authority. This is because the search for the higher law has often been realized in terms either of an absolute monarch ruling by divine right or of an absolute will of the people.

This search for an absolute upon which to base the body politic and its laws was made necessary by the decline of traditional religion, under which
the laws of God had formed the basis of positive law as interpreted and mediated by the church. But with the decline of the church and the emergence of a secular realm possessing a dignity in its own right, this prior arrangement became inadequate. At this point, the prince began to assert his absolute authority by stepping "into the pontifical shoes of Pope and Bishop." He alone became the source of law which he himself stood above. It was a small step from absolute monarchy to the concept of the nation or the general will as the new absolute source of law. Because of the ever-present threat of state absolutism, Arendt rejects the notion of a transcendent law which the state must attempt to realize in terms of its own positive legal order.

If this need for an absolute is a phenomenon peculiar to modernity, then Plato can in some sense be considered the first modern. It was he, according to Arendt, who announced "the rebellion of the philosopher against the polis." Through his doctrine of ideas, he established the priority of the intelligible world over the sensible world, of reason over acting. In his famous cave parable, the clear sky of ideas, which represents truth, is only dimly reflected upon the wall of the cave, which represents the common world and the affairs of men. In order to see the truth, one must leave the cave in solitude in order to contemplate the eternal essences which are hidden from the senses.

The significance of this for Arendt is that truth understood in such a manner is always compelling, as we have observed above, and thus leaves no room for the exercise of human freedom. For he who has seen the truth and possesses reason must logically be given primacy in the realm of human affairs. Thus in the Republic, Plato advocates that the ideal state be ruled by the philosopher-king, i.e., by him who has forsaken the cave of human
affairs to contemplate the truth, and who has returned in order to realize this truth within the world. She believes that Plato has only succeeded in establishing another type of tyranny which can only serve to destroy the integrity of both philosophy and the public realm.

For Arendt, the connection between Plato's doctrine of ideas and the activity of fabrication is obvious. The craftsman first visualizes in his mind's eye the artifact which he wishes to fashion, i.e., he is guided by the "idea" of the object. Having "seen" this idea, he then proceeds to produce the artifact accordingly. The idea of a chair, for example, transcends the actual chair and constitutes a measure or standard by which the latter is constructed. Similarly,

if the republic is to be made by somebody who is the political equivalent of a craftsman or artist, in accordance with an established τέχνη and the rules and measurements valid in this particular "art," the tyrant is indeed in the best position to achieve the purpose. If transcendent standards are to be applicable to the body politic, then there is a need for someone who has taken time to contemplate these—an expert who "is understood to be competent to deal with human affairs in the same sense as the carpenter is competent to make furniture or the physician to heal the sick."37

It is Arendt's belief, then, that political absolutism is inherent not only in Plato's concept of transcendent ideas, but in any notion which rests upon "the domination of human affairs by something outside its own realm."38 The political realm cannot assume a dignity of its own if it is dependent for its validity upon a higher authority. Action thus becomes impossible and speech is rendered unnecessary, since the validity of political truth is already established through the contemplation of the philosopher,
who need only find some means to enforce it. The lesson is clear for Arendt: the realm of action (or any other realm, for that matter), if it is to maintain its integrity and even its very existence, cannot derive its legitimacy from an external source. Arendt, therefore, asserts the autonomy of human affairs.

It is on this point that she appeals to the thought of Machiavelli. Few people view Machiavelli in as positive a light as she does, for his very name has generally become synonymous with the utterly ruthless and amoral politician. But Arendt contends that this aspect of his work has been misunderstood. She sees his real significance in that he "was the first to visualize the rise of a purely secular realm whose laws and principles of action were independent of the teachings of the Church in particular, and of moral standards, transcending the sphere of human affairs, in general." Machiavelli did not so much hold that statesmen should not act according to moral standards; but he did believe that the standards which applied to private life were of a different nature from those of political life. Goodness, in the Christian or Greek sense, can only be destructive of the political realm. The true political criteria for action are "glory" and virtu, or excellence.

It was Machiavelli who, according to Arendt, coined the word lo stato and first conceived of the possibility of a revolution, though he never used the word. Because of this, he can be considered the great prophet of the revolutionary era, the men of which aimed to establish a genuine public realm invested with its own dignity. As a man of the Renaissance, Machiavelli "ransack[ed] the archives of ancient prudence" and, in so doing, rehabilitated the old Roman notion of foundation as the source of authority
for the new body politic.

He saw that the whole of Roman history and mentality depended upon the experience of foundation, and he believed it should be possible to repeat the Roman experience through the foundation of a unified Italy which was to become the same sacred cornerstone for an "eternal" body politic for the Italian nation as the founding of the Eternal City had been for the Italic people.42

The authority inherent in this act of foundation meant that it was not necessary to conceive of a transmundane source conferring legitimacy upon the law.

Consequently, Arendt draws a distinction between two conceptions of law: the Hebrew and the Roman. Despite her own Jewish origins, she definitely favors the latter. The Hebrew notion of law can be understood only in terms of "commandments," which are to be obeyed. The covenant between God and his people concluded on Mt. Sinai was by no means a mutual contract between equals. Its validity rested not upon any promises of the latter but upon the divine origin of the law itself. It was to be kept because the almighty, transcendent God commanded it. This Hebrew concept of law became the basis of the mainstream western legal tradition, even in its secularized natural law manifestation. The social contract theories of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were the logical consequence of this development. What is significant for Arendt is that law seen in the light of this tradition stands in need of a higher sanction for its authority. In the absence of religious sanction conferred by the church, this need is likely to be filled by an absolute prince or nation, which "in terms of public law, [can] do no wrong because it [is] the new vicar of God on earth."43

It is clear, she believes, that another source of authority is needed, and this she attempts to find in the Roman concept of law. The Roman lex
(like the Greek νόμος) has no need of divine authority. "The original meaning of lex is 'intimate connection' or relationship, namely something which connects two things or two partners whom external circumstances have brought together." Law is not born of commandment but of alliance, partnership or treaty between equals established by or augmenting the original act of foundation. This act itself carries authority which needs no higher sanction and no absolute to confer validity upon the body politic. Even the expansion of the Roman Republic can be seen not so much as the imposition of an absolute will upon conquered peoples, but as the extension of the system of treaties and alliances inherent in the founding of Rome to include other communities, "that is, to the ever-extending group of Roman socii who formed the societas Romana." The Roman concept of law rests upon that most political capacity of man to make and keep promises, whereas its Hebrew counterpart rests upon the commands of a transcendent absolute, which may or may not be the biblical God, but which is in any case above the law. Because the former has its origins from within the political realm and the latter from without, Arendt must ultimately decide in favor of the former.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

What are the practical implications of Arendt's notion of the political? What does this mean for the setting up of concrete bodies politic? One relevant characteristic of the polis of antiquity is its size: the most perfect realization of the genuinely political was no larger than a single city. This is important for Arendt's purposes, since it is very difficult,
if not impossible, to organize a great number of people over a great area on an equal basis without imposing that levelling conformity which she fears so much. "Freedom, wherever it existed as a tangible reality, has always been spatially limited." Therefore she has a definite preference for the small-scale political organization, which is better able to realize the true public realm, because of its proximity to its participants. She lauds the spontaneous formation of people's councils which has occurred time and again in the initial fervor of the revolutions, only to be crushed with the consolidation of a unified party apparatus.

In terms of modern states, she favors federal systems, such as the American republic or the Canadian confederation, over highly centralized nation-states, such as the French Republic. Her ideal form of federalism disperses power over a wide area and realizes within its boundaries a number of public spaces, associated as equals and not merely as subdivisions of a larger whole. This federalism also offers a means of bringing about a just international order without homogenizing the peoples of the world. This she asserts against a trend that would make of the world a single nation-state.

THE GENERAL SHAPE OF THE POLITICAL

Thus far we have described Arendt's notion of the political in terms of a few key concepts or components, each of which encompasses a crucial aspect of the political. It remains for us to make a concluding statement concerning the shape of the political in Arendt's thought. Two points
should be emphasized.

First of all, the political is not directly related to the state as a concrete institution, particularly in her mature thought. In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, as we shall see in the next chapter, she believed that the modern nation-state still constituted a vehicle (albeit a most imperfect vehicle) for the expression of the political. Her protestation against the totalitarian ideologies was at least partly due to the latter's hostility to the state. Nevertheless, by the late fifties she had come to the conclusion that the state is itself an absolutist institution and that the political is best expressed by means of spontaneously-formed workers' councils and soviets. This is first seen in her writing on the Hungarian Revolution and later in *On Revolution*. It is these councils which are the true heirs of the ancient polis and not the modern state with its established legislative, executive, administrative and judicial structures. Since the essence of the political is participation and not justice or legality, the workers' council is a more perfect conduit for the genuinely political.

Secondly, in accordance with her de-emphasis on the state, Arendt tends to detach the political from the framework of a legal system. As we noted above, she was initially more positive in her evaluation of the western natural law tradition. In *The Origins* her notion of the political at least partially recognized the need for a system of laws for the protection of the rights of the citizenry. But in her later writings, she moved away from established structures toward a conception of the political consisting of free, spontaneous action in concert with
one's fellow human beings. This requires, to be sure, a public realm—a "permanent" space wherein action finds its place in the world and its needed stability. Nevertheless, Arendt's public realm is radically non-institutional and, for all its supposed permanence, every example she cites of its appearance in the modern world has been extremely fleeting. In Arendt's view, the political exists not only apart from all institutions but to a large extent in opposition to them.

2Ibid., p. 41.
3Ibid., p. 179.
4Ibid., p. 188.
5*Between Past and Future*, pp. 104-5.
6*Human Condition*, p. 233.
7Ibid., p. 205.
8*Between*, p. 153.
10*Human Condition*, p. 188.

11If Arendt were alive today, she would undoubtedly point to the Iranian Revolution as a case in point. The Shah headed a formidable military apparatus possessing the most technologically sophisticated means of violence. However, in the face of nearly universal unpopularity, i.e., in the face of the power of human beings acting in concert and refusing to be ruled by him, the Shah was not able to retain his throne.

12*On Revolution*, p. 150.
13Ibid., p. 146.

14One thinks, for example, of the forcible enslavement of one
people by another or perhaps the opposite, namely, the violent uprising of slaves against their masters. Neither of these is a political act, according to Arendt's view.

15Between, p. 149.

16One can hardly, however, consider Arendt an adherent of Rousseau's philosophy, since she disagrees with his attempt to locate the source of both power and authority in the general will of the people. Rousseau's is merely another absolutist approach to politics and thus in accord with the main trend of the modern age.

17Between, p. 153.

18Human Condition, p. 234.


20Between, p. 169.


22Ibid., p. 207.

23Ibid.

24Ibid., p. 205.

25Ibid., p. 175.

26Human Condition, p. 237.

27To conceive of politics as the product of fabrication is, as we have seen, another means of doing so, but this results in the annihilation of action and thus ultimately of the public realm.


30Ibid., p. 200.

31Origins, p. 464.

32See below, p. 118f, for a fuller discussion of the totalitarian notion of lawfulness.

33Between, pp. 91-141.
34 On Revolution, p. 158.
35 Between, p. 107.
36 Ibid., p. 112.
37 Ibid., p. 111.
38 Ibid., p. 114.
39 See, for example, the interpretation of Leo Strauss, Thoughts on Machiavelli (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).
40 On Revolution, p. 29.
41 Ibid., p. 209.
42 Between, p. 138.
43 On Revolution, p. 191.
44 Ibid., p. 188. Arendt's account here of the Roman notion of law is difficult to substantiate. Her assertion that lex does not depend upon a higher law for its validity is somewhat misleading if not totally incorrect. It is true, of course, that the word lex refers to written, positive law and is thus to be distinguished from ius, meaning law or right or justice. But the differences between these two words ought not to be exaggerated. Furthermore, the concepts of ius naturale and ius gentium have a long history within Roman jurisprudence. Two quotations are relevant here:

"Manifestly the Roman law in all stages, early and otherwise, was based upon natural law. Differences arose not in the principles of the natural law, but rather in the interpretations placed upon that law by the Romans in the different stages of their development." (Lester B. Donohue, Elements of Roman Law [Brooklyn, N.Y.: Remsen Publishing Co., 1930], p. 5.)

"[N]ot only is the term 'natural law' specifically defined by the institutional writers in an ethical sense, but the method of reasoning which is used in their interpretation of the law is founded upon the theory that the civil law must be brought into harmony with natural justice—what is right in the nature of things." (William C. Morey, Outlines of Roman Law, Comprising Its Historical Growth and General Principles [New York and London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1884, 1912; second edition, 1914], p. 111.)

45 On Revolution, p. 189.
46 Ibid., p. 279.
The rise in 1980 of the Polish independent labor union Solidarity provides one more example of politics in the Arendtian style. Were she still alive, Arendt would certainly be turning out numerous essays on Solidarity, hailing it as yet another instance of what happens when people come together to act. Lacking weapons of violence and means of force, the people of Poland exercised their collective power in such a way as to confound the official Communist Party and gain recognition of the union. But again, as in the other revolutions, the spontaneous workers' councils are eventually crushed and supplanted by the central Party apparatus.

Having defined what Arendt believes to be the components of the "political," we may now proceed to examine in more detail its decline and ultimate demise in the ideologies of the modern age. As we have seen, ideologies are "isms which to the satisfaction of their adherents can explain everything and every occurrence by deducing it from a single premise." They are ways of seeing and explaining the world which do not correspond with reality as it is actually experienced by men. Politically, they impose an absolute standard for political activity from without the political realm, thereby violating the autonomy of that realm. The ideologies are the culmination of the increasing worldlessness which has come to characterize men of the modern age. Having lost a home in the world, i.e., having become alienated from the world, human beings look for a new home which the ideologies have promised.

In this chapter, we shall discuss the decline and demise of the political in four distinct stages, viz., the nation-state and nationalism, the rise of the bourgeoisie, Marx and Marxism, and totalitarianism. This order is roughly chronological in that the rise of the nation-state antedates the rise of bourgeois liberalism, which in turn comes before Marxism. Finally, totalitarianism follows the other three. This does not mean, of course, that the four stages do not to some extent coincide. Nation-states still exist, although by Arendt's way of thinking the classic age of nation-states is over.
utopian (and thus unrealistic) is the notion that time freed from the necessities of production will be used for "higher" pursuits. For emancipation from labor must mean the emancipation from consumption as well. But this is not possible.

A hundred years after Marx we know the fallacy of this reasoning; the spare time of the animal laborans is never spent in anything but consumption, and the more time left to him, the greedier and more craving his appetites.

Man as animal laborans is inevitably bound to the recurrent cycles of production and consumption, and his entrance into the public realm can only bring this cycle into that realm and thereby destroy it. Far from emancipating man from necessity, as Marx intended, increasing automation and mechanization has succeeded in actually subjecting all men and all of life to necessity. In such a society, work is subsumed under labor. Production is for consumer goods rather than durable goods. Action quickly disappears under the onslaught of a consumer society.

The danger of future automation is less the much deplored mechanization and artificialization of natural life than that, its artificiality notwithstanding, all human productivity would be sucked into an enormously intensified life process and would follow automatically, without pain or effort, its ever-recurrent natural cycle. The rhythm of machines would magnify and intensify the natural rhythm of life enormously, but it would not change, only make more deadly, life's chief character with respect to the world, which is to wear down durability.

This is something which Marx could not understand and which led to a fundamental contradiction in his thought. In attempting to free man from necessity (which, after all, is what the Athenians wanted to do as well), Marx succeeded in actually abolishing freedom and enslaving all men to necessity.

The difference between Marx's future society and the ancient Athenian polis is most crucial. Both agreed that there was a need for man to have
leisure from labor. Both sought a state of affairs lacking a division between rulers and ruled. But the Athenians could never have desired the demise of politics. For Marx, the essence of politics is the rule of one class over another by means of the state apparatus. For the ancients, the essence of politics was action and speech between equals within the public realm. For the former, freedom does not really exist until politics comes to an end. For the latter, freedom cannot exist without the genuine public realm. Whereas the ancients desired leisure from labor in order to pursue politics, Marx desired leisure from both labor and politics. In the absence of both these activities, the vacuum is filled by meaningless "hobbies" or "play" (defined by the modern age as all activities unconnected with making a living).

Thirdly, Marx's attempt to liberate man from necessity in the future society is very much in line with most revolutionary thinking since the French Revolution. Whereas the first revolutionaries at the dawn of the modern age (e.g., Machiavelli, the American founders, and the early French and Russian revolutionaries) sought the establishment of freedom within a genuine public realm, later revolutions followed the path eventually set by the French Revolution and brought what Arendt calls the "social question" into their thinking and activities. The social question is simply that concerning the existence of poverty. The ancients had always held that poverty was due to necessity and was thus a fact of life. It was a matter for the private household and not for the public realm. The approach taken by the ancients to the social question was to keep it (and thus necessity) out of the public realm since it could only have the effect of strangling action. The early revolutionaries did not depart from this view and took part in
the revolutions in order to found a space for freedom. This was a most political of goals.

It was the thought of Rousseau and the path eventually taken by the French Revolution which led all subsequent revolutions to aim at the emancipation of the masses from poverty. The concern for poverty is not in itself bad, but this goal deflected the revolutions from their proper aim, viz., the foundation of freedom. With the masses of the poor demanding liberation from necessity, the revolutions came under the dictates of the inexorable biological cycles of life, which can never be satisfied. The original goal of freedom was soon replaced by the goal of abundance. Abundance, which is by nature a nonpolitical aim, soon came to be seen as a political concern to be undertaken by the political realm. The revolutions were soon dominated by necessity.

This relates to the fourth point concerning Marx, viz., his use of the notion "exploitation." Whereas it had previously been assumed that poverty was due to necessity, which could not be resisted and overcome (at least for the major part of a community), Marx put the issue of poverty into political terms by asserting that it was due to exploitation rather than to necessity. Exploitation changes the way in which the social question is conceived by assuming that it is due to deliberate action of a ruling class which possesses the instruments of violence. Marx thus proceeded to redefine freedom as emancipation of the masses from this exploitation and therefore from poverty. This summoned up a rebellious spirit on the part of the masses themselves. For if poverty is due to necessity, it is futile to protest. But if it is due to deliberate action of others, it is one's duty to free oneself from such a condition by changing the rela-
tionship between the classes.

If Marx helped in liberating the poor, then it was not by telling them that they were the living embodiments of some historical or other necessity, but by persuading them that poverty itself is a political, not a natural phenomenon, the result of violence and violation rather than of scarcity. For if the condition of misery—which by definition never can produce "free-minded people" because it is the condition of being bound to necessity—was to generate revolutions instead of sending them to their doom, it was necessary to translate economic conditions into political factors and to explain them in political terms.83

This attempt of Marx to see a basically economic issue in political terms leads to another contradiction in Marx's thought. For in trying to bring about freedom from out of necessity, he actually succeeded in bringing all of life and history under the sway of necessity. This paradox Marx inherited from Hegel's dialectical view of history and the notion of historical inevitability. Marx had already defined an economic problem in political terms. It was a short step from this to the realization that one can just as easily interpret politics in economic terms. This Arendt calls the "reversibility of concepts" which she believes to be inherent in all Hegelian thinking.84 Even the political matter of exploitation could now be seen as subject to the determinism of economic laws.

Marx's place in the history of human freedom will always remain equivocal. It is true that in his early work he spoke of the social question in political terms and interpreted the predicament of poverty in categories of oppression and exploitation; yet it was also Marx who, in almost all of his writings after the Communist Manifesto, redefined the truly revolutionary elan of his youth in economic terms. While he had first seen man-made violence and oppression of man by man where others had believed in some necessity inherent in the human condition, he later saw the iron laws of historical necessity lurking behind every violence, transgression, and violation.85

Marx was able to see politics in terms of economics and economics in terms of politics, precisely because he, like so many modern thinkers, did not take seriously the important distinction between these two categories. As
we have seen above, the tendency to blur the boundaries between categories is characteristic of the modern age. Marx has carried this tendency further than his predecessors. If he confuses economic and political categories, he confuses the more basic distinction between freedom and necessity, seeing each in terms of the other. History, which had previously been considered the realm of freedom *par excellence*, is conceived by Marx in terms of laws of necessity.

Fifthly, Marx understands action in terms of violence. Since in Arendt's estimation violence is prepolitical and has no place in the public realm, she objects quite strongly to Marx's conception on this point. The ancient idea of action and speech as consisting of πείθειν (persuasion) is at variance with the Marxian identification of action and violence. For Marx, violence is the "midwife of history," an assertion which follows almost as a matter of course from the view that "labor created man." Since both labor and work contain elements of violence, to conceive of human history and action in terms of these categories invites the conclusion that violence is inevitably a part of history. For Arendt, this constitutes nothing less than a glorification of violence, something unthinkable to the older tradition of political thought. Aristotle had defined man as a "political being" and as a "being possessing speech." In so defining him, he described humankind according to his highest possibility, viz., life in the polis conducted by means of speech. This definition was designed to distinguish the free man from the slave and the Greek from the barbarian. Man in his most human existence is a being who has left behind violence and has embraced the common life of the public realm. Marx denies this tradition, primarily because he sees history as the product of fabrication and as the
result of the willed aims of men.\textsuperscript{86}

Closely related to this error of Marx is a sixth point, viz., his attempt to "realize philosophy," something which would have seemed a contradiction in terms to the ancients. In his last thesis on Feuerbach, Marx sets forth a new role for philosophy: "The philosophers have only interpreted the world differently; the point is, however, to change it." Whereas the older tradition had always conceived of philosophy as a turning away from the common world of human affairs, Marx for the first time sees philosophy as a means of remaking the world. Philosophy, which had always been seen as remote from the everyday world, would now become "common sense" reality for the masses. Traditional philosophers, it is true, had always prescribed "certain rules of action," but this was never deemed to be the chief end of philosophy. The effect of the Marxian approach to philosophy is to rob action of its own meaning by subjecting it to an outside ideological construct. Action is no longer free; it is subject to necessity.

What Marx has done is in a sense quite novel, and Arendt makes much of his radical departure from the older tradition. But in another way Marx represents the culmination of the modern age (which as we have seen also has a long history) with its tendency to obliterate the distinction between thought and action. By subjecting the latter to the former, Marx is only carrying further what Plato believed to be a primary task on earth of the philosopher. Having seen the outside of the cave, and thus reality in itself, he must be compelled to return to the cave of human affairs and rule the city on the basis of his acquired wisdom and insight into the truth. The effects of this absolutist approach to politics have only recently come to fruition and Marx is perhaps the logical heir to
this modern tradition.

Arendt isolates the contradictions in the thought of Marx and summarizes them in a single paragraph. They concern his approach to labor, violence and philosophy.

If labor is the most human and most productive of man's activities, what will happen when, after the revolution, "labor is abolished" in "the realm of freedom," when man has succeeded in emancipating himself from it? What productive and what essentially human activity will be left? If violence is the midwife of history and violent action therefore the most dignified of all forms of human action, what will happen when, after the conclusion of class struggle and the disappearance of the state, no violence will even be possible? How will men be able to act at all in a meaningful, authentic way? Finally, when philosophy has been both realized and abolished in the future society, what kind of thought will be left? \[^{87}\]

These perplexities are not external to Marx's basic theory. They are not the result of accidental oversights on his part but touch the very heart of his thinking. These contradictions in Marx's thinking have contributed to the antipolitical trends of the twentieth century, in particular, the ideological mass movements and the rise of totalitarianism.

**TOTALITARIANISM**

Totalitarianism represents the culmination of the modern age. All the destructive trends which we examined above have come together in the horrors of the totalitarian regime. Since the end of the second World War, a debate has developed over the differences between conventional tyrannies and despotisms (which have always been with us) and the more recent totalitarian regimes. Is the distinction legitimate? If there is indeed a difference, is it qualitative or merely quantitative? Many would
be inclined to believe that there is no essential difference between authoritarianism and totalitarianism and that the latter differs from the former only in the extent to which modern governments possess greater technical means of control than their predecessors. A variant of this view has been put forth by Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski in *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy.* According to them, such "ideological" arguments as Arendt's ignore the fact that totalism in some form has existed for centuries (e.g., in the mediaeval monastery, where a specific type of discipline controls all aspects of the member's life). Others have granted the basic difference between authoritarianism and totalitarianism but have seen this difference to correspond to that between rightist and leftist dictatorships. An example of this is the view expressed by Jeane Jordan Kirkpatrick in her article, "Dictatorships and Double Standards."  

Arendt does not agree with either of these schools of thought. For her the true novelty of totalitarianism does not consist merely in its possession of the instruments of terror, although this is certainly part of it. Nor can the difference between authoritarianism and totalitarianism be identified with that between right and left. Neither of these views does justice to the real character of totalitarian dictatorship. Totalitarianism is as much a phenomenon of the right as of the left, and the similarities between nazism and Stalinism, which are usually thought to be opposites on the political spectrum, actually outweigh the differences. In *The Origins of Totalitarianism,* Arendt discusses both manifestations under the single rubric of "totalitarianism." Her primary concern is nazism, owing to her personal experience as a Jew in Germany under Hitler's
rule. Stalinism is treated secondarily, but not because it is less important or significant in her sight. Her failure to discuss Stalinism in as full a manner as nazism is due primarily to her lack of personal experience with the former. She has been criticized for this, but given her emphasis on experience as the source of reflection on philosophy and the common human world, it is not surprising that she should spend proportionately more time on nazism.

For Arendt, the crucial point concerning totalitarianism is that it represents an entirely new way of thinking. Traditional tyrannies aimed at the more modest goal of maintaining the power of the tyrant. This involved the banishment of men from the public realm. It did not, however, require the systematic subjection of the private realm to the tyrant's control or an attempt to transform the community according to so-called higher goals. Totalitarianism, on the other hand, represents the culmination of the trends isolated by Arendt in her treatment of the modern age. Although her Origins was written at the beginning of her career (1951), the remainder of her works can be considered to be an attempt to come to grips with the philosophical implications of totalitarianism and to understand its roots in the modern age from a more systematic viewpoint. It is, therefore, not inappropriate to place totalitarianism at the end of the present discussion of Arendt's approach to the ideologies of the modern age.

Arendt isolates at least seven main characteristics of totalitarianism. First of all, "movement" is a characteristic feature of totalitarianism in two ways: (1) out of power, it takes the form of a movement which militates against all status quo structures and organizations; (2) in power,
it remains a movement which can never allow itself to solidify into a new status quo lest it lose its unique momentum. Such movements can only arise in a world which has lost touch with reality. "Totalitarian propaganda can outrageously insult common sense only where common sense has lost its validity." Since worldlessness has been characteristic of the modern age, totalitarian movements exploit the plight of mass man in his alienation from the common human world by creating a substitute world, which functions as a new home for such men. Totalitarian movements create such a world by means of propaganda.

Before they seize power and establish a world according to their doctrines, totalitarian movements conjure up a lying world of consistency which is more adequate to the needs of the human mind than reality itself; in which, through sheer imagination, uprooted masses can feel at home and are spared the never-ending shocks which real life and real experiences deal to human beings and their expectations. Such a false world can never allow itself to be reconciled with existing reality.

When the totalitarian movement has actually come to power, it retains its character as a movement. This is quite unlike the conventional tyranny or dictatorship which, once it has seized control of the state, behaves as a state subject to conventional political considerations such as preservation of national interest and the establishment of an administrative apparatus. The totalitarian regime does not behave this way. It must remain a movement and must never allow the community to settle into a status quo. Consequently, it must avoid both absolutism (in the sense of absolute monarchy) and nationalism.

At the time it seized power the danger to the movement lay in the fact that, on one hand, it might become "ossified" by taking over the state machine and frozen into a form of absolute government, and
that, on the other hand, its freedom of movement might be limited by the borders of the territory in which it came to power. To a totalitarian movement, both dangers are equally deadly: a development toward absolutism would put an end to the movement's interior drive, and a development toward nationalism would frustrate its exterior expansion, without which the movement cannot survive.  

Both Hitler and Stalin wanted a continued state of permanent instability in order that their movements not lose their revolutionary momentum and utopian character. This was the real meaning of Trotsky's "permanent revolution."

The "so-called totalitarian state" employs a terroristic secret police and encourages and thrives on a sense of isolation and distrust between neighbors and family members. The "citizens" of a totalitarian regime can never be permitted to lose their sense of fear and distrust and must never be allowed to become accustomed to or comfortable with a predictable pattern of state behavior. The movement must not be allowed to lose its momentum and the people must be kept in a constant state of turmoil and unease. After all, people who are secure in their stations have a potential basis upon which to oppose the regime. To keep this sense of movement, real power must rest with the party and not with the state. For Arendt, this arrangement is not accidental but essential to the survival of the totalitarian movement. To maintain a sense of instability on the part of the populace, a secret police, such as the NKVD (KGB) in the Soviet Union or the SS in Germany, is a necessary adjunct to the party.

Secondly, the adherents of the totalitarian movement believe they possess the "key to history" and that all their actions--indeed reality itself--must be made to conform to it. This, for Arendt, is the essence of ideological thinking, which has been with us since the dawn of the
modern age, to be sure, but only reached its logical end in the totalitar­
ian movements of this century. Again, this represents a confusion of
the two categories of thought and action. We have seen this in connection
with Karl Marx's attempt to realize philosophy in the new society and his
view of history as a class struggle motivated by economic forces. Marx's
thought provided a "key to history" for the communist movement and for
Stalin's rule. For Hitler and national socialism, the key to history was
the ideological conception of history as a struggle between races for
supremacy. The foundation for nazi ideology was laid by the tribal na­
tionalisms, the pan-movements and imperialism in the nineteenth century.
Two points are crucial in both these conceptions. First, since ideologies
offer a new interpretation of the world for a community which has lost
touch with its sense of reality, reality must be made to conform to that
ideology. Secondly, since the boundaries of class and race cut across
national and state boundaries, ideologies based upon the former divisions
are necessarily destructive of conventional political divisions and of
the state conceived of as a limited institution.

A third characteristic of totalitarianism is the notion on the part
of its adherents that anything is possible. This follows from the very
nature of ideological thinking. For if reality is no longer an obstacle
to the achievement of goals, then no considerations of practicability need
any longer limit the activities of the followers of the movement. Con­
ventional political considerations have already gone by the wayside, so
that even the raison d'êtat does not constitute a factor. The horror of
the totalitarian movements is not so much that its adherents persecute
Jews and kulaks, but that they believe that the classless society or the
purification of the Nordic race is actually achievable and that all obstacles to this overriding goal must be eliminated.

Fourthly, totalitarianism aims at the total domination of every facet of human life and ultimately of the entire world. This is a most crucial difference with conventional authoritarianism. Authoritarianism sets up the rule of a single individual over the state, where once the public realm stood. Because the tyrant banishes men from, and thereby destroys, the public realm, men are no longer citizens of the polis—the community of equals brought together by speech and action—but subjects of a ruler. Nevertheless, conventional authoritarianism leaves other institutions intact and does not deliberately disturb traditional customs and mores. Authoritarianism and totalitarianism manifest different attitudes toward freedom.

Quite apart from its origin in Roman history, authority, no matter in what form, always is meant to restrict or limit freedom, but never to abolish it. Totalitarian domination, however, aims at abolishing freedom...93

Authoritarianism further rests upon an established hierarchy of traditional institutions and lesser groups. Witness, for example, the manner in which Franco used the existing church as a means of maintaining his power. Totalitarianism, however, cannot tolerate the existence of "mediating structures" between the supreme power and the masses, since these structures are potential sources of authority in their own right. Such institutions represent an obstacle and a threat to the primary goal of total domination. The masses are to be kept isolated from one another with their only focus of loyalty being the regime itself. It is for this reason (quite apart from Marx’s atheism) that Stalin was bound to try to
destroy the church as an autonomous entity. The existence of stable institutions also poses a threat by allowing society to "ossify" into a predictable pattern. As we have seen, this goes against the necessity of the regime to keep the masses "on their toes" and constantly guessing, for "this consistent arbitrariness negates human freedom more efficiently than any tyranny ever could."94

The totalitarian regime must, in accordance with its goal of total domination of a community, attempt to dominate the entire world. The traditional tyranny is content to maintain its power over a limited geographical area. As long as other nations do not dispute his authority, the tyrant has no cause to take up arms against them. This is not the case with the totalitarian dictator. By its very nature, totalitarianism cannot rest until the entire world falls under its control. Ideological thinking, which attempts to remake reality according to its own logic, cannot tolerate the existence of a state of affairs which negates that logic. Once it has gained control over a single nation, it soon becomes apparent that two inherently conflicting "realities" cannot live side by side. After all, the class struggle or the racial conflict is a worldwide phenomenon not confined within the geographical boundaries of one or two political entities. The workers' revolution must take place on a worldwide scale if it is to succeed at all. The Jewish question can be settled once and for all only if the entire earth is made subject to that "final solution."

Fifthly, totalitarianism aims at the negation of human plurality through the abolition of individuality and the transformation of human nature itself. This it does by preying on the plight of mass man, who is atomized and isolated but is no longer an individual. Mass man is the
ideal subject of the totalitarian movement, because he retains no intermediate relationships with other human beings or institutions. He represents the epitome of worldlessness, having no real home on earth. The movement offers him a new home in a new "world" in exchange for unconditional obedience to the dictates of the movement. Because mass man has lost his place in the world and his individuality, he has lost something of his very humanity.

Total domination, which strives to organize the infinite plurality and differentiation of human beings as if all of humanity were just one individual, is possible only if each and every person can be reduced to a never-changing identity of reactions, so that each of these bundles of reactions can be exchanged at random for any other.

Totalitarian regimes rob men of their capacity to choose freely either for or against them. Such a regime does not want loyalty or support. A Stalin fears most the convinced communist. This is because the supporter has come to his convictions by an act of the will, and the will can just as easily turn against the regime as choose to uphold it. The totalitarian dictator demands obedience not loyalty. "The aim of totalitarian education has never been to instill convictions but to destroy the capacity to form any." For this reason, periodic purges are necessary, not to punish opponents of the regime, but to prevent even the possibility of opposition by rooting out the human capacity to consent or to withdraw consent.

What makes conviction and opinion of any sort so ridiculous and dangerous under totalitarian conditions is that totalitarian regimes take the greatest pride in having no need of them, or of any human help of any kind. Men insofar as they are more than animal reaction and fulfillment of functions are entirely superfluous to totalitarian regimes. Totalitarianism strives not toward despotic rule over men, but toward a system in which men are superfluous. Total power can be achieved and safeguarded only in a world of conditioned reflexes, of marionettes without the slightest trace of spontaneity.

It is this destruction of man's very humanity, and not the use of violent
means, that constitutes the real horror of totalitarianism. The conventional authoritarian despot may use similar means to punish opponents, but he does not try to destroy the capacity to oppose. He is content to demand the loyalty of his subjects.

The totalitarian dictator goes even a step further than to abolish the human will. In accordance with the all-encompassing ideology which must remake reality to its own specifications, human nature itself must be transformed. Marx's future society is inhabited by the "new socialist man" whose motives and behavior are completely different from bourgeois man. National socialism aims at the creation of the racially superior Aryan, unpolluted by the blood of "inferior" strains. The totalitarian regime cannot rest until humankind itself is changed and its nature is forged anew from the bottom up.98

Sixthly, the totalitarian regime is characterized by its isolation of objective enemies who, by definition (i.e., irrespective of their specific actions), are considered opponents of society. This is a logical move taken by a regime which regards everyone, insofar as he is human, as suspect. The objective enemies are regarded as such, not because they actually oppose the regime, but because the prevailing ideology identifies them as enemies. Thus Hitler was bound to destroy the Jews and Stalin the kulaks because they constituted, by their mere existence, a presumed threat to the goals of the regime. Nevertheless, the need for objective enemies is not exhausted by the elimination of the Jews and the kulaks. Once these groups are obliterated, new enemies must be found in order to preserve the momentum of totalitarianism. Even when there are no more kulaks, there are still those with "bourgeois tendencies" which must be isolated and executed.
Even when the Jews are no more, there are still other inferior races, e.g., the Poles, Ukrainians, etc., which must be gotten rid of. The existence of such objective enemies is not just a matter of official hatred of such groups. The presence of enemies within serves the propaganda purposes of the regime and fits in with the character of totalitarianism as a movement in which anything stationary is an obstacle in its way. When the regime ceases to have objective enemies, it must ultimately cease to be totalitarian.  

Seventhly and finally, totalitarianism is characterized by lawlessness, or rather by its own type of lawfulness. It is not simply identical to the tyranny, in which one man rules according to no law but his own whims. Totalitarian rule, it is true, disregards all positive laws, even those which it has established itself. Nevertheless, the totalitarian regime is bound to act in accordance with the official ideology which, as we have seen, is believed to possess the key to history and to have discovered the laws by which history operates. The totalitarian ruler believes he has immediate access to this ultimate law and therefore does not have to mediate this through any positive laws. The logic of the ideological conception of reality directly governs the activities of the regime without the intermediary role of legislative statutes. Totalitarianism destroys the established legal system without building a new one in its place.

Totalitarian policy does not replace one set of laws with another, does not establish its own consensus iuris, does not create, by one revolution, a new form of legality. Its defiance of all, even its own positive laws implies that it believes it can do without any consensus iuris whatever, and still not resign itself to the tyrannical state of lawlessness, arbitrariness and fear. It can do without the consensus iuris because it promises to release the fulfillment of law from all action and will of man; and it promises justice on earth because it claims to make mankind itself the embodiment of law.
Unlike the traditional tyranny, totalitarianism does not rule in the interest of one man; it rather attempts to realize the ultimate law of history or nature at the expense of everyone's immediate interest.

This ultimate law of nature or history is, first and foremost, a law of movement and it is for this reason that totalitarianism must oppose positive laws. Positive laws are a force for stability since they effectively regularize the "ever changing movements of men." As such they are an obstacle to the inexorable progression of history. They are something static and imperfect which cannot be allowed to obstruct the execution of perfect justice (as they conceive it). Since "lawfulness sets limitations to actions," the regime cannot permit itself to operate through generally known laws or it must cease to be totalitarian.

What we are finally presented with here is a picture of a state of affairs in which no remnant of the genuinely political is present. The public realm is no longer in decline; it has been obliterated along with human freedom which is its essence. It is not merely action which is dead. It is no exaggeration to say that no human faculty is left untouched by the scourge of totalitarianism. Even life in the private realm is impossible in any normal sense. Indeed it is quite impossible to speak of the private and public realms, since under totalitarianism the distinction is without meaning. The boundaries between the categories of Arendt's ontological hierarchy are not merely blurred; they are destroyed. The lost sense of praeval wholeness has been restored in the modern totalitarian movement. The plurality of men has yielded to the existence of one man who, as a single species, is made to serve the ongoing historical process
as seen through ideological eyeglasses. The stark horror of totalitarianism lies not in its methods but in its aims which are to be realized according to pure categories of thought which have no basis in reality.

Ideologies always assume that one idea is sufficient to explain everything in the development from the premise, and that no experience can teach anything because everything is comprehended in this consistent process of logical deduction. For Arendt, our common experience in the world is the basis for all human activity, and the conscious repudiation of this experience is a repudiation of that which makes us human.

For her, totalitarianism is the fruit of ideological thinking and indeed "all ideologies contain totalitarian elements." This is as true of the earlier ideologies of nationalism, imperialism and bourgeois liberalism as of nazism and communism. To the extent that men have reduced reality to a single facet of that reality, the resulting way of looking at things is at least potentially totalitarian. This is true of the bourgeois reduction of politics to economics as well.

The bourgeois class, having made its way through social pressure and, frequently, through an economic blackmail of political institutions, always believed that the public and visible organs of power were directed by their own secret, nonpublic interests and influence. In this sense, the bourgeoisie's political philosophy was always "totalitarian"; it always assumed an identity of politics, economics and society, in which political institutions served only as the facade for private interests.

Totalitarianism is thus not an aberration which grew in the peculiar conditions of Germany and Russia; it is something which is present in every community in the modern age. The potential for totalitarianism exists even in the so-called democratic societies of the west where mass society has come to take the place of both the public and private realms. It exists to the extent that the antipolitical trends of the modern age
have taken their toll in the national communities of western Europe and North America.

We thus conclude our discussion of a most important theme in Arendt's writing, namely, the demise of the political in the modern age. The nation-state and nationalism, the rule of the bourgeoisie, Marxism, and finally totalitarianism are four distinct stages in this progressively antipolitical development. Modern man has repudiated his own existential experience, has been uprooted from his home in the world, and has embraced the ideologies in a futile attempt to find a new home in a false world. He has forsaken participatory politics in favor of some variety of political absolutism. The less a given body politic resembles the ancient Athenian polis, the less it can be said to partake of the genuinely political, the essence of which is true freedom—the freedom to act.

1 Arendt, Origins of Totalitarianism, p. 468.
2 Human Condition, p. 33.
3 Ibid., p. 28.
4 Ibid., p. 40. In her article "Reflections on Little Rock," Dissent 6 (Winter 1959): 45-56, she introduces a further distinction between "mass society" (which is nearly equivalent to her definition of "society" above) and "society" as such, which lacks the expansive character of the same word as used in The Human Condition. Here the social realm assumes the more limited role of an intermediate category between the private and public realms with its own legitimate area. The distinction is further developed in "The Crisis in Culture" (Between Past and Future, pp. 197-226). Here, however, "society" is used in the sense of a certain segment of the population "which disposed not only of wealth but of leisure time, that is, of time to be devoted to 'culture,'" and thus exercised an often coercive influence on the culture as a whole. (Ibid., p. 198)
Although she introduces a distinctive definition of the term *power* in her later works, her usage of the term here is not yet sufficiently differentiated from conventional usage.
This is, of course, quite different from the mutual promises characteristic of the genuine public realm, as we have seen.

44 Origins, pp. 269ff.
50 On Revolution, p. 155.
52 John Locke, Second Treatise, section 94.
53 Human Condition, pp. 115ff, 109-118.
54 On Revolution, p. 132.
55 Ibid., p. 127.
56 Ibid., p. 115.
57 Ibid., p. 33.
58 Power is here used in Arendt's earlier, less specific sense.
59 Origins, p. 139.
60 Ibid., pp. 123-57.
61 Human Condition, p. 41.
62 On Revolution, p. 231.
63 The Federalist, No. 50, quoted in On Revolution, p. 227. This quotation is interesting in that reason, as seen here, does not seem to speak with one voice.
64 On Revolution, p. 276.
65 Human Condition, pp. 234-6.
66 Ibid., pp. 220f. See also her essay, "The Concept of History," Between Past and Future, pp. 41-90.
67 Origins, p. 231.
68 Ibid., p. 311.
69 Ibid., pp. 223-4.
70 Human Condition, p. 44.
71 Ibid.
72 Ibid., p. 110.
73 Ibid., p. 112.
74 Ibid., p. 116.
76 Human Condition, p. 96.
77 Ibid., p. 131.
78 Ibid., p. 133.
79 Ibid., p. 132.
81 On Revolution, p. 58.
82 Ibid., p. 56.
83 Ibid., p. 57.
84 Ibid., p. 59.
85 Ibid., p. 58.
86 Between, pp. 21-3.
87 Ibid., p. 24.
89 Commentary 68 (November 1979): 34-45.
90 Origins, p. 352.
91 Ibid., p. 353.
92 Ibid., p. 389.
93 Ibid., pp. 404-5. In the Origins it is apparent that Arendt has not yet narrowed her definition of freedom to that of positive participation in the public realm. In On Revolution she more clearly distinguishes the freedom of the public realm from the mere negative civil liberties championed by the bourgeoisie. Given this later distinction, it is hard to imagine this quotation appearing in her later works. The mature Arendt sees tyranny as precisely the abolition of public freedom, though not necessarily of private civil liberties (On Revolution, p. 127).
94 Origins, p. 433.
We note once again the change which has occurred over time in Arendt's conception of law. In the *Origins* she is more appreciative of the natural law tradition in western thought. She also sees law more in terms of the protection of rights at this earlier stage and is willing to see some legitimacy in the traditional Rechtsstaat. It is not until later that she begins to speak of public freedom and her "Roman" conception of law as the making of mutual promises.

*Origins*, p. 470.

105Ibid.

106Ibid., p. 336.
HANNAH ARENDT'S CONTRIBUTION

In her writings Arendt has given us insight into a number of different, though related, phenomena peculiar to the past two centuries. More specifically, for our purposes, she has contributed to a greater understanding of four phenomena of the modern age, viz., the nation-state, bourgeois liberalism, Marxism and totalitarianism. Being peculiar to modernity, they together constitute a process through which the political, as she understands it, gradually went into decline and finally disappeared altogether. Arendt's contribution to political theory can be placed into four broad groupings.

First, her attempt to isolate, define and recover the political is a most significant contribution. The necessity for reflection of a uniquely political character is important in today's world where theorists have tended to concentrate on economistic and behavioral approaches to social problems. Arendt has distanced herself from these trends by viewing the political as something distinct from other areas of life and "autonomous" in the sense that it is not dependent on (and cannot be reduced to) some other aspect or area of life for its own legitimacy. The continuing crisis of western civilization and the recurring problems of our own era have forced us to face the political aspect of these problems with somewhat greater attention than our predecessors. Four specific areas of crisis warrant attention,
One thinks, first of all, of the crisis of the welfare state in the western industrial nations. After the end of the second World War, western Europe and North America experienced dramatic economic growth entirely unprecedented in the history of mankind. Out of the ruins of war rose a society based upon the hope of an indefinitely expanding "pie" in which more and more people would assume an affluent lifestyle. Those left behind or on the fringes of this development would be compensated by a plethora of social programs administered by the government. Even those at the centre of the "affluent society" could expect to benefit from the welfare state, which was expected to provide incentives to the accumulation of greater wealth and the expansion of industry. Whatever poverty remained could be ameliorated, if not actually eliminated, by a network of transfer programs and income guarantees. Although real equality might not be achieved, everyone's economic share would continue to expand as total wealth grew.

More recently, however, this continual economic expansion has been called into question by the events of the last decade or so. The dependence of the west on middle eastern oil, increasing unemployment, and the simultaneous threat of inflation and depression have all worked to shatter the illusions created during the first two post-war decades. The increasing power of large multinational corporations and the inability of governments to solve the problems created by the slowing of economic growth have forced us to take another look at the state as a "political" institution and to inquire whether we have been seeking the wrong solutions to these problems. This has led to a reorientation of politics in most industrial nations.
where long entrenched coalitions have been toppled at the hands of opposition parties amidst promises of basic change. In some countries, this has resulted in a sharp turn to the right, while others have turned to the left. It is highly unlikely that either bureaucratic socialist or corporate capitalist "solutions" will be able to grapple with the crisis of our post-industrial societies. In light of this, we shall have no choice but to reassess the nature and role of the state and the character of our political life, much as Arendt has done in her works.

A second issue pointing to a crisis of the political is the relative decline of the United States from its dominant international position after the second World War. For the last generation or so, we have become accustomed to believing in our own "omnipotence" in world affairs. This is illustrated by the agonizing question asked following the victory of the Communist forces in China in 1949: "Who lost China?" This question could only have been posed by a nation believing itself able to control events in farflung corners of the globe and unaware of the domestic factors bringing about this outcome. The illusion of omnipotence continued throughout the fifties and early sixties despite the loss of American monopoly over nuclear weapons. The War in Vietnam, of course, was a watershed experience resulting in a reassessment of America's position in the world. The emergence of newly-independent nations of the so-called third world was another factor rendering obsolete those approaches based on American dominance in the international arena.

The imperial impetus of the American mission to the world has historically been defined by our commitment to certain ideals, e.g., democracy, freedom,
private enterprise, progress and economic growth. As faith in these ideals wanes, so does the sense of mission on the part of the American people. As long as faith in these ideals remains intact, we can always rationalize our own position vis-à-vis the rest of the world. Most Americans are unsatisfied with traditional rationales for imperialism resting upon purely pragmatic and balance of power considerations. Americans have tended to accept an imperial role for their country, if such a role is joined to lofty concerns such as the protection of human rights or the propagation of democracy throughout the globe. As doubts increase about the wisdom of such pursuits, however, it is almost inevitable that an internal reassessment of this nation's role will follow. It is in this context that we have much to gain from Arendt's reflections on imperialism in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*.

A third area of crisis has come about because of the advance of military technology and the nearly infinite capacity of destruction which a few nations hold over the entire world. The nuclear age has brought us face to face with a situation in which national sovereignty, a traditional attribute of states, must be called into question. Since the end of the second World War, the international community has reached a state of paralysis. In previous eras, the leaders of a state were less reluctant to wage war for a limited goal (e.g., land, royal succession, revenge, etc.) since the stakes were also limited. Their own country might, of course, be conquered, but even in that event the population was not likely to be exterminated or the civilization obliterated. This is no longer the case today. We have come to the place where neither the United States nor the
Soviet Union can risk settling a dispute through direct military means. In a third world war, the stakes would be human civilization and life itself. Arendt is certainly correct to question the reality of sovereignty in our age, and we would be wise to reassess this concept in light of the present nuclear stalemate.

A fourth area of crisis is the resurgence of nonwestern cultures and civilizations previously considered peripheral by the dominant European powers. Since 1960 nearly all of the European colonies have been succeeded by independent states, most of which have elected to remain nonaligned in the struggle between east and west. The resulting "nonaligned movement" has produced an increasingly multipolar world. Although both the United States and the Soviet Union have sought the support of these "third world" nations, neither country has been able to create reliable client states willing to fully implement the policies of one of the superpowers in that part of the world. An example of this is the Islamic world which, to be sure, does not form a stable bloc but which, nevertheless, poses a sizeable obstacle to the designs of both the United States and the Soviet Union. The rise of so-called muslim fundamentalism in Iran and Libya may be a harbinger of a new force in world politics, confounding the conventional analyses of western secular observers.

In the midst of the crises of politics in the modern age, Arendt's reflections on the subject are like a breath of fresh air blowing through the corridors of conventional and obsolescent political theories. Her work can be seen as part of a broader trend in political theory attempting to recover genuinely political theory in the face of the reductionistic
approaches of liberalism, behavioralism and Marxism. At least five thinkers might be cited as part of this trend. The decline and recovery of the political provides the theme of Sheldon S. Wolin's analysis of the history of political philosophy, *Politics and Vision*, in which he traces its development from Plato to the present, under the assumption that the specifically political can be distinguished from other areas of life. He concludes that the political, which began to decline during the liberal era, has now been entirely sublimated in an age characterized by organization.

Leo Strauss has also been occupied with the recovery of political philosophy, although his interpretation and conclusions are quite different from Arendt's. He believes that political philosophy properly seeks knowledge of the whole or the general and of the ideal political order. He sees Plato and Socrates standing at the beginning of political philosophy rather than at the beginning of the end, as does Arendt. Strauss differs with Arendt over the place of Machiavelli as well, whom he views as the first modern—the initiator of the first of three "waves" of modernity.

George Grant, who also follows the Platonic tradition, believes that the homogenizing tendencies of technology, liberalism and capitalism tend to render irrelevant specific bodies politic and to destroy their integrity as separate political entities. The object of his concern is specifically his own Canadian nation, which he believes is threatened by these homogenizing forces coming out of the United States. In contrast to Arendt, he appeals to a transcendent realm (which is informed by a heavily Platonized Christianity) as the basis for his political philosophy. Accordingly he assigns to the state the basically conservative task of maintaining public
order and the traditions upon which it rests.³

The definition of "political reality" has also been taken up by Eric Voegelin, who distinguishes it from reality as a whole, but within extremely comprehensive boundaries. Indeed, it comprises the sum total of human relations as set apart from the nonhuman world. The eclipse of political reality he attributes to the heresies of "gnosticism," a loose category in which he places modern ideologies, such as liberalism and Marxism.⁴

Finally, the Dutch Christian philosopher, Herman Dooyeweerd, attempts to get at the political by examining the internal structure of the state as distinct from other societal structures and institutions. Working out of a tradition extending from Calvin, through Johannes Althusius and Abraham Kuyper, he has developed a pluralistic theory of societal institutions and structures. Grounded in a divine creation order, each of these is subject to its own law which determines its peculiar character.⁵

Despite their very real differences in worldview and approach, the above figures have one thing in common: a rejection in principle of the mainstream political orthodoxies, whether these be labeled modern, humanistic, ideological or gnostic. Each has attempted to isolate and describe the political in distinction from other areas of life and to give some account of its decline in the present era. Although it can hardly be said that we are witnessing the birth of a new "school" in political theory, we may be seeing in these thinkers the beginning of a trend away from these orthodoxies and toward greater acceptance of alternative approaches.
Arendt's first contribution consists of her attempted definition and recovery of the political. Her second major contribution consists of her treatment of the nation-state, in particular her calling attention to significant difficulties, or at least ambiguities, which have clouded it from its beginning. First, she has pointed out and criticized the absolutist tendencies which have characterized many nation-states. For Arendt, the classic example of the nation-state is France, the nation *par excellence*, due to its early experience with absolute monarchy and centralized republicanism. But the contradictions are most pronounced in those countries where religious, cultural or linguistic cleavages have posed an obstacle to the centralizing tendencies of nation-states. Such countries would include Belgium, where the historic animosity between Flemish and Walloon cultures has forced the Belgian government to move toward a political order better able to take this into account. The revival of Basque and Catalonian regionalism in Spain points to the inadequacy of the nation-state as a model for that country.

But Arendt's analysis is most relevant to the middle east where the cleavage between Jew and Palestinian Arab has been exacerbated by the unfortunate appropriation by Zionists of the centralized nation-state based upon the rule of a single religious group. The effort to establish a unitary Jewish state is a major factor in her eventual disillusionment with Zionism as a political movement. Instead she favored a "bi-national" federal state which would be the joint undertaking of both Jews and Arabs in Palestine. Only thus could the aspirations of both groups be accommodated within the same land and under a single political order.\(^6\)
Arendt's preference for federal systems is undoubtedly justified, particularly in countries which require such an arrangement, because of sheer size (e.g., Canada and the United States) or because of strong regional or ethnic traditions (e.g., West Germany or Yugoslavia). That it is desirable to have levels of government which are closer and thus potentially more responsive to the people, is now commonly accepted in North America. Arendt expresses admiration for the New England town meeting tradition for precisely this reason. If a variant of this system had taken root in Palestine when the British mandate came to an end, she is quite certain that the current struggle between Israeli and Palestinian would not have occurred. The attempt by the Zionists to create a centralized nation-state only served to shut out the Palestinians and to sow the seeds of the present turmoil.

A third major contribution which Arendt has made consists in her willingness to break with liberalism and Marxism and to identify the very real similarities between the two. Both view the existence of the state as dependent upon the economic. In the case of the early liberalism of Locke, the body politic is the chief protector of private property. In later liberalism—the "rule of the bourgeoisie"—it has become the active promoter of the expansion of wealth (i.e., the welfare state). In Marxism the state is seen as a function of the economic substructure. Arendt is correct to see the economic reductionism of both these ideologies.

Her views are particularly interesting in light of the popular tendency to see liberalism and Marxism—capitalism and socialism—as polar opposites. The rise of the Cold War has further encouraged the notion that there is a sharp antithesis between the two economic systems. This has
led, in turn, to a manichaean view of the struggle between capitalism
and socialism, of which Arendt will have no part. In fact, the two
ideologies are very close in spirit.

Our problem today is not how to expropriate the expropriators, but,
rather, how to arrange matters so that the masses, dispossessed by
industrial society in capitalist and socialist systems, can regain
property. For this reason alone, the alternative between capitalism
and socialism is false—not only because neither exists anywhere in
its pure state anyhow, but because we have here twins, each wearing
a different hat.... In essence, socialism has simply continued,
and driven to its extreme, what capitalism began.

A similar point is made by the Dutch political economist Bob Goudzwaard. He believes that capitalism and socialism are rooted in a common
Enlightenment tradition which has elevated economic progress to the status
of a primary human goal. Men have confessed their faith in progress and
have seen it as a source of salvation for mankind and the solution to
all his problems. Against this common faith, the differences between the
two ideologies pale in significance. In fact, the individualism of the
one leads almost inevitably to the collectivism of the other.

There can be no absolute individual freedom which does not in due
time conjure up, through its consequences, the necessity of central
control and domination. In other words, classical liberalism—which
advocates decentralized, autonomous freedom of progress for business—logically leads to the necessity of growing central control of society.
The natural complement of autonomous and decentralized freedom in
the production sector of society is the centralization of social
responsibility in the state. Classical socialism—the pursuit of
centralized responsibility—is therefore not only the opposite of liberalism, but also its consequence. It is precisely in their
opposition that they presuppose one another.

What is needed, according to Goudzwaard, is an economic system which avoids
both individualism and collectivism, breaks with the Enlightenment faith
in progress, and follows the norm of economic stewardship.

A fourth contribution made by Arendt is her explanation of the rise
of totalitarianism and her now classic portrait of the totalitarian regime. Her emphasis on the continuities between nazism and communism seem to this writer to be correct. Despite the fact that the two phenomena are often conceived to be ideologies of the extreme right and left respectively, it is difficult not to conclude that they are more alike than they are different. Whether or not one agrees with her broad historical interpretations, one must admit to a connection of some sort between the ideologies of the previous two centuries and the rise of totalitarianism in this century. Her isolation of totalitarian elements in bourgeois liberalism is particularly intriguing. This suggests that our western societies are by no means immune to totalitarianism and that its rise is just as likely to come from large corporate interests and private concentrations of power using the public realm for their own purposes as from Marxism or crude racism.

DEFICIENCIES IN HER CONCEPTION OF THE POLITICAL

In her writings Hannah Arendt has given us insight into a number of different, though related, phenomena peculiar to the modern era. Nevertheless, there are certain deficiencies in her thought which, I would contend, keep her from fully grasping the nature of the political. One thing must first be said concerning my remaining comments. Arendt has often been criticized with respect to specific historical accounts, e.g., the rise of antisemitism and imperialism. In particular, she has been castigated for her treatment of Jewish history. I shall not, however,
attempt to pinpoint flaws in her historical accounts or interpretations (although these may exist), since this does not fall within the confines of the present treatment. What I shall attempt to do is to isolate what seem to me to be problems in her general political theory. These may be grouped into two main categories.

First of all, in reading Arendt's writings, one is forced to inquire as to the precise content of action. Action, of course, represents the very heart of her notion of the political and figures prominently in her discussions. She goes to great lengths to describe action and to set forth what she sees to be its salient characteristics. She is quite explicit on the place of action in her ontological framework as a whole. It is the raison d'être of freedom. Nonetheless, when all is said and done, one is left with the persistent feeling that she has not sufficiently explained what action really is. What sort of event or activity constitutes an example of action? How do we know it when we see it? If the criterion of action is the performance itself, can any activity done for the sake of performance qualify as action?

Margaret Canovan has pointed out the disparity between Arendt's relegation of violence to the prepolitical realms and her appeal to the great deeds of Achilles as examples of action. For Achilles' deeds were performed in the context of the Trojan War, and even the polis itself was very much preoccupied with military concerns, surrounded as it was by rival city-states and the Persian Empire. If this is so, on what basis can Arendt appeal to such activities as representative of action? Her uncertainty on this point can be seen from her treatment of the act of
foundation. She emphasizes that this act is essential for the constitution of bodies politic, but she is unclear as to whether it is an example of action or of fabrication. On the one hand, she describes the act of foundation as the initiation of something new and as an interruption into the normal flow and patterns of ordinary affairs. In stressing its unprecedented nature, she seems to signify an understanding of it as an example of action.

However, she also acknowledges the element of violence necessary to the successful constitution of a new body politic. After all, the body politic is not created "out of nothing, but out of a given material which must be violated in order to yield itself to the formative processes out of which a thing, a fabricated object, will arise." The act of foundation seems to involve the necessity of making something—of employing select means in accordance with a specified end, viz., the creation of a body politic. Arendt claims that even the activity of the legislator is prepolitical, since he is merely building the framework and creating the space within which genuine action can take place. If this is indeed so, her notion of law must be relegated to the prepolitical, and the making of promises which is its basis can no longer be seen as an example of action.

What then is the content of action and its correlate speech? What do men speak of and what acts do they perform in the public realm? To a large extent, Arendt believes this question to be irrelevant in that it calls attention away from that which is most important about speech and action, namely, their agent-revealing capacity.
Action and speech go on between men, as they are directed toward them, and they retain their agent-revealing capacity even if their content is exclusively "objective", concerned with matters of the world of things in which men move, which physically lies between them and out of which arise their specific, objective, worldly interests.\(^\text{13}\)

What these "objective, worldly interests" are is not particularly important for her and thus do not figure very prominently in her writings.

However, at a conference at York University in Toronto in 1972, she was pressed on precisely this point and made the following comments.

Life changes constantly, and things are constantly there that want to be talked about. At all times people living together will have affairs that belong in the realm of the public—"are worthy to be talked about in public." What these matters are at any historical moment is probably utterly different. For instance, the great cathedrals were the public spaces of the Middle Ages. The town halls came later. And there perhaps they had to talk about a matter which is not without any interest either: the question of God. So what becomes public at every given period seems to me utterly different. It would be quite interesting to follow it through as a historical study, and I think one could do it. There will always be conflicts. And you don't need war.\(^\text{14}\)

It seems then that there exists no invariable body of matters which are by nature political. This changes with the times. The boundaries enclosing the political and distinguishing it from the social are quite broad. "Public debate can only deal with things which—if we want to put it negatively—we cannot figure out with certainty."\(^\text{15}\) Thus it might be a matter of administration that a bridge must be built over a certain river. But the decision as to where it should be built is a political matter which must be deliberated upon within the public realm. Many issues, she is willing to admit, possess a "double face" in that they touch upon the political and the social.

If this is so, one is left with the further question as to how she
can separate the political from the private or social as absolutely as
she does in the bulk of her writings. In referring to each of man's
activities and faculties as autonomous, she attempts to set up "water-
tight" categories which have little, if anything, to do with the other
categories. Many commentators have pointed out the unfeasibility of such
an attempt since the economic and the political frequently overlap. It
is obvious that reality cannot be divided as neatly and simply as she
would like. And she must finally admit this by acknowledging the dual
nature of many issues.

The second major series of questions concerns the act of foundation.
From within the framework of her thought, one must ask the following:
If the act of foundation is actually a prepolitical phenomenon (a point
on which, as we have seen, she is far from clear), what is the implication
of this upon her notion of the autonomy of each of man's activities? For
if the act of foundation is the source of authority for the body politic,
the latter's authority must then issue from outside the realm of action
and from the realm of work or fabrication. She has thus done precisely
what she has tried to avoid in her thought, namely, to subject one realm
to another or to appeal to one realm as the source of validity for another.

From outside her framework, it is necessary to ask whether the act
of foundation can really provide a source of authority for the body politic
in the absence of a transcendent natural law or divine ordination. If
so, what provides the source of authority for the act of foundation itself?
Because of her wish to preserve the autonomy of action she is not willing
that it should be dependent upon a transmundane realm. At the same time,
of course, she does not wish to defend a complete arbitrariness within the
By appealing to an event in the past, resting upon the mutual promises of men, she believes that she can provide a new source for tradition to which men of the present can bind themselves. This act of foundation is something fixed (since the past cannot be changed) and thus serves as a firm base upon which to erect and further augment the body politic. This saves the body politic from the ill-fated search for an absolute.

Two problems present themselves immediately. First of all, if there exists a danger in the appeal to a transcendent realm for the source of authority, why would the same danger not also be present in an appeal to the past? An appeal to divine right or to natural law has often been a justification for absolute monarchy, to be sure. But is this a result of a basic flaw in these concepts or is it the result of their misuse? It is just as possible for a potential absolute ruler to appeal to the past as the justification for his ambitions. In the United States, for example, the evocation of the founding fathers' memory is a much more potent and frequently used way of gaining support for proposed policies than an appeal to natural law or divine right. At present the former is much more subject to abuse than the latter. If Machiavelli and the eighteenth-century revolutionaries turned to the ancient Roman past as a precedent for their activities, as Arendt believes they did, so did Benito Mussolini in his attempt to revive the glories of the Roman Empire in the twentieth century.

Secondly, if the source of authority for law rests upon the capacity of man to make promises, what provides the criterion for the content of these promises? Without such a criterion it is impossible to remove the
element of arbitrariness from the making of laws. What is to keep men from coming together within a body politic and "promising" or "contracting" with each other to disenfranchise a certain segment of the population or even to annihilate them altogether? It is highly doubtful that Arendt's "Roman" conception of law could have prevented the rise of totalitarianism or the Holocaust. Ultimately she is left with no standard by which to measure positive law except as to whether it was drawn up in a mutual and open manner. All types of laws—good, bad or indifferent—can result from such a participatory process. Even if present legislators respect the "tradition of the founders" and act in accordance with their example, there is no guarantee that the latter's original act was not in itself of negative significance. The foundation of the Third Reich would hardly be considered an act from which the German people could derive a source of authority for particular laws. Although Arendt would probably not wish to defend an historicistic conception of authority and law, i.e., that all law is historically determined and thus relative to the time and culture in which it is enacted, there is at least a tendency toward such a position in her thought.

Undoubtedly, this could have been avoided if she had followed her initial convictions concerning the nature of law which she expressed in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. Here, as we pointed out above, she was more sympathetic to the idea that positive law is the embodiment of a higher law. Indeed, her concept of the political seemed to rest more on the notion of a *Rechtsstaat* protecting the rights of its citizens by means of the law. The error of the ideologues was in believing that they had direct
access to the higher law without the mediation of positive law. Later, of course, Arendt moved away from the concept of higher law altogether and embraced the mutual contract which carries authority within itself. If she had stayed with her earlier view and developed her theories therefrom, she might have been able to avoid the pitfalls of historicism.

I believe that there are two basic components lacking in Arendt's definition of the political, namely, the element of force and a normative concept of justice. Concerning the first, she has not correctly understood that the state possesses means of enforcement and that this is something essential to its structure and task. This explains why she equivocates as to whether the act of foundation is rooted in action or fabrication, the latter of which necessitates the use of violence of some kind. Her reluctance to endorse violence is certainly understandable, particularly in an age of total war and nuclear proliferation. But to admit that the state validly possesses means of enforcing its legal decisions is not necessarily the same as supporting violence, i.e., the illegitimate and excessive use of force. Even if one believes law to consist of the making of promises, some agency or institution is mandated to prevent men from breaking those promises. The existence of such an institution presupposes at least an implied use of force. The tendency of people to break promises and to violate the law is something which Arendt does not take sufficiently seriously. In this respect, she seems to be guilty of what, according to Leo Strauss, the ancient sophists were guilty of, namely, reducing politics to rhetoric, "So far from being 'Machiavellians,' the sophists--believing in the omnipotence of speech--were blind to the sternness of politics."
The second component lacking in Arendt's thought is a normative concept of justice. Without justice, the state with its coercive capacities is no different from an organized gang of thieves. Justice is every bit as essential to the structure of the state as the power of enforcement. The two must not be separated. But, unlike action, speech and freedom, justice is not included in Arendt's pantheon of central political concepts. Indeed, it is conspicuous by its absence. This is not to say she had no sense of justice. Her descriptions of the ideologies in the *Origins* convey outrage over the denial of rights to minorities in Europe and elsewhere. Nevertheless, a systematic treatment of justice is not present in her writings. This leads her in directions which are at least potentially problematic. This can be seen, for example, in her treatment of the school integration controversies of the fifties. Her defence of the priority of smaller political divisions over the larger body politic leads her into the same quandary as the advocates of "states' rights." Greater autonomy granted to smaller units may increase the power of concurrent majorities, but it may also interfere with the granting of basic rights to all citizens irrespective of residence. Arendt's emphasis on positive political participation leads her to place greater emphasis on the former, whereas an emphasis on justice would probably result in tilting the balance in favor of the latter, at least in this case.

One is forced to ask, finally, whether the absence of a normative concept of justice is not in fact inevitable given the character and direction of Arendt's thought. Her unwillingness to acknowledge any norms transcending human experience does not leave room for an external "moral"
standard, such as justice, which might impede the free exercise of action within the public realm. This is quite in accordance with what Bernard Crick calls "her pagan, humanistic, existentialist ethics." But because her thought lacks a recognition of a normative order, her view of the political is seriously inadequate and is not likely to transcend the crisis of the modern age which she analyzes so eloquently. Indeed, her thought must ultimately be seen as dependent upon and in continuity with the modern age, which is better defined (contra Arendt) by its repudiation of transcendent norms rather than by its acceptance of them.


3Works of George Parkin Grant include *English-Speaking Justice* (Sackville, N.B.: Mount Allison University, 1974); *Lament for a Nation* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1965); *Philosophy for the Mass Age* (Copp Clark Pittman, 1966); *Technology and Empire* (Toronto: Anansi, 1969); and *Time as History* (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 1969).


5Works of Herman Dooyeweerd include *In the Twilight of Western Thought* (Nutley, N.J.: The Craig Press, 1960); *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, 4 vol. (Nutley, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1969); and *Roots of Western Culture* (Toronto: Wedge, 1979).
6 See the series of essays on Zionism and the Jewish state in *The Jew as Pariah*, pp. 125-222.

7 *Crises of the Republic*, pp. 214-5.


9 See, for example, Jacob Robinson, *And the Crooked Shall Be Made Straight: The Eichmann Trial, the Jewish Catastrophe, and Hannah Arendt's Narrative* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), in which he meticulously examines every detail of Arendt's argument in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*.

10 Canovan, p. 62.


12 *Human Condition*, pp. 194-5.

13 Ibid., p. 182.


15 Ibid., p. 317.


18 Hill, p. 43.
A SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY
OF THE
WRITINGS OF HANNAH ARENDT

BOOKS


ARTICLES


"Why the Cremieux Decree was Abrogated," Contemporary Jewish Record 6 (April 1943): 115-23.


"Concerning Minorities," Contemporary Jewish Record 7 (August 1944): 353-68.


"Imperialism: Road to Suicide," Commentary 1 (February 1946): 27-35.


"Peace or Armistice in the Middle East." Review of Politics 12 (January 1950): 56-82.

"Religion and the Intellectuals." Partisan Review 17 (February 1950): 113-6


"Europe and the Atom Bomb," Commonweal 60 (September 17, 1954): 578-80.


BOOKS ABOUT HANNAH ARENDT:


ARTICLES ABOUT HANNAH ARENDT:


