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Thinking the Sources of Political Moment with Arendt

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THINKING THE SOURCES OF POLITICAL MOMENT WITH ARENDT

working paper¹

If one casts so much as a glance over the literature on the political and its contemporary condition, one encounters close to infinity of inquiries into, what is often referred to as, political apathy, the decline of political participation and the transformation of politics into something of a communal service rather than an autonomous sphere of human existence. This research however is not an attempt to think a remedy² for this condition through examination of specific political practices or the possible reform of political structures. Nor is this meant to expose modernity as a project inherently anti-political and therefore irremediably falling into political apathy. This is an attempt to think the political *in* and *with* modernity. The project is propelled by an effort to resist the condition of ‘post-ness,’ which assumes all that is behind closed, finished, devalued, exhausted while, paradoxically it continues to hold the present in captivity of that behind: it is an effort to retrieve the forces contained by that very ‘behind,’ as harmful as the behind might have once been. It could be read as an attempt at re-opening modernity to seize some of its potential, above all the potential of the ‘Absolutes abandoned’ and the ground wiped out beyond repair, beyond even the notion of grounding.

For to live in a political realm with neither authority nor the concomitant awareness that the source of authority transcends power and those who are in power, means to be confronted *anew* [italics mine, op.a.], without the religious trust in a sacred beginning and without the protection of traditional and therefore self-evident standards of behavior, by the elementary problems of human living-together. [BPF, 141]

¹ The first draft of this paper was presented at the workshop on *Time and History*, at the European University Institute, Florence, May 2004.

² Assuming that one were to claim or accept validity of thinking along the linear medical logic of illness-diagnosis-remedy in the framework of the political condition and the political as a condition.

Unmistakably, this dramatic diagnosis by Arendt resounds at the same time with certain exaltation of ‘new beginning,’ of a force hidden in those missed and still open historical possibilities that persistently inspired Walter Benjamin. It is the excitement of the unanswered questions finally admitted unanswerable but not dismissed, those questions that emerged from radical experiences of the 20th century, which can never end and are still lived even if the concrete events in specific moments of historical time have ended. One should not, as one cannot, attempt to answer these questions or close these experiences but one could try to point in a different direction, transforming our thinking from a train-like movement, confined to track-lines only, into random trails, something of Heidegger’s ‘off the beaten track,’ for this is what pursuing unanswerable questions is about – random, undirected, potent motion into the open.³

In that sense, this paper is but a fragment of a broader research meant to offer a different understanding of the political, the one that would remain outside the confines of the prevalent debates on politics as a search for ideal order, the debates which insist on engaging with the political by researching into forms of government or universal principles of administering human affairs. As Friese and Wagner argue, this traditional understanding of political philosophy is proving limited and obsolete in the encounter with the contemporary political developments.⁴ The attunement of political philosophy to the living experience of the political, the attunement in substance not simply in the subject matter, has to be based above all on the recognition of the break with the philosophical tradition as the break with the idea of philosophy realized in the revelation of the Absolute.⁵

³ This distinction is meant as distancing from Arendt’s much favoured phrase of thought-trains, suggestive of the predictability, familiarity, immutability of train tracks, which correspond to the motion and route known, tied and controlled, by contrast to the random, unpredictable and open movement ‘off the beaten track.’

⁴ Friese, Heidrun and Wagner, Peter: The Nascent Political Philosophy of the European Polity, in *The Journal of Political Philosophy*, Vol. 10, n. 3, 2002.

⁵ The idea of political philosophy as inquiry into ideal order of human affairs for eternity, which ignores the specificity of historical situation, has already been challenged by various discourses such as the feminist or cultural-theoretical, and arguably most potently, by the in-flow of historical sociology as a response to ‘the need for politico-philosophically exploring a polity in its specificity, that is, its being situated in space and time.’ [Friese and Wagner, 2002:342-343] The work introduced or intuited in this paper however is an attempt at opening political philosophy in a different direction, to a kin discipline of ethical philosophy, contesting disciplinary Puritanism by challenging the idea that the political common can be thought without reference to the ethical common. This movement towards the ethical is driven by the intuition that politico-philosophical discussions, which are not indifferent to the spatio-temporal frameworks of their concerns, could still be substantively enriched from the, tentatively called, purely

This inquiry proceeds not so much through the exploration of the concept of the political as of the concept of political action: the wider project is not meant to define political action through the definition of the political but rather to understand the political through the understanding of the source(s) of political action, the main underlying assumption being openly Arendtian – that the political can appear and does appear only through the occurrence of political action. Any such inquiry therefore must begin with Hannah Arendt, the one thinker who built her political project around the concept of action. The thinker whose influence continues to escape the confinement of mono-directional development, direct descendants and loyal camps of thought, Hannah Arendt owes the particularity of her theory of politics to its central concept, the concept of political action, that which is the essential of politics without being its essence, itself non-essential, the ultimate contingent.

Pursuing her own path, Arendt develops a critique of Western philosophy, as a hostage to the first philosophy, in relation to the political realm, the least valued of all spheres of concern to humans by philosophers since Plato. Philosophy concerns itself with that which always is, it seeks to leap outside the flow of time and near the eternal.⁶ In counter-distinction, the political is inescapably all about time: it is in time, with time, against time, for time. It means that the political is not simply situated in time but it originates as a peculiar relation to time, a particular form of response by community to the finitude and unpredictable mutability, the two dimensions in which time appears to humans and is felt or suffered by them. The political is rooted in the human condition of temporality, as the effort to build a world, the space of the common however defined, lasting despite time but also in and through time. The gap between that of time and that of eternity is the gap between politics and philosophy but this gap is more than difference and less than partition: the two continuously relate while always in tension and commotion. And so not only because certain political options or programmes may interfere with philosophy but also because the project of philosophy in the realm of

philosophical end of the spectrum. The ethico-philosophical impulse does not entail a return to the ideas of ‘good life’ realizable through politics but refers to the contemporary opening of ethical philosophy to radical re-conceptualisations of certain traditional notions, common to ethics and politics, which have survived the break with philosophical tradition and continue to be present in the politico-philosophical discourse in a certain fossilized form of understanding, while deeply troubled, emptied, tormented and stung by the concerns of the contemporary thought to which they cannot respond.

⁶ See in particular Arendt’s discussion of Kafka’s parable in *Between Past and Future*.

human affairs has been anti-political since Plato, a persistent effort to establish an order for eternity, the order that would end all political efforts and banish all political action, thus banishing all that is boundless, unpredictable, changing, becoming and ending, banishing all perilous contingency out of human existence and the world.⁷ By contrast, Arendt's theory of the political, which ultimately is a theory of political action, is the thought of the dynamism of politics, not of that which is built for eternity but that which occurs in a moment to be replaced and even undone by another momentous occurrence to be replaced by another momentous occurrence.

My intention in this paper is restrained to looking into Arendt's thinking of the moment of political action and its origin, as the (core) dimension of the larger pursuit of the sources of the political in the political itself, beyond transcendental absolutes and beyond the need for foundationalist grounds for political projects in modernity. By understanding the political through action, Arendt reveals – or perhaps retrieves – the inherent value of the political as the *locus* of freedom, which is determining of man *qua* man.

Political moment

Arendt's work situates political philosophy back in time, co-locating it with the political as action which appears only in the historical time, constantly and incessantly keep breaking it up, interrupting, ending and starting anew. This is an effort contrary to the philosophers' attempts to displace the world from time, to arrest the motion of time and freeze it as a mortal image of eternity or eternal processes, the attempts which abound in the tradition of (political) philosophy from Plato to Marx and even further on, to the present day in the schools that continue to concern themselves with universal principles (Rawls, Habermas). If there is a space for political philosophy at the time of gap which modernity for Arendt is, this space is not in the metaphysical 'region over and above' time that Arendt criticizes in her interpretation of Kafka's parable. [BPF]

⁷ While the differences between the two thinkers are profound, Oakeshott's metaphor of politics in his critique of rationalism corresponds closely to Arendt's understanding of what the political is about: "Our mistakes will be less frequent and less disastrous if we escape the illusion that politics is ever anything more than the pursuit of intimations [...] In political activity, then, men sail a boundless sea; there is neither harbour for shelter nor floor for anchorage, neither starting place nor appointed destination..." Oakeshott, Michael: *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays* [London and New Jersey; Methuen & Co, Rowman and Littlefield, 1977], pp.125 & 127.

Arendt's theory of the political as theory of action thus embodies all that philosophy seeks to exterminate: the boundless in source and outcome, coming unexpectedly, interrupting, breaking into the web of relations, which only can capture and retain it but are inevitably transformed by it. Once happened, it cannot be undone but it need not have ever happened for the principle of action is freedom, the source of all that need not have been. Centering on action in developing her theory of politics, Arendt removes politics from the activities which minister to the necessities of human existence, politics is not a question of ordering and harmonizing biologically conditioned relations among individuals, ordering and harmonizing that seeks to become *the* order and *the* harmony. Politics is about that which has become or has happened although no law of nature or universe demanded or determined it.

Freedom enacted through political acts is inscribed into men through the fact of birth, the appearance of the unnecessary that breaks into the automatic process of nature and silence of the universe, to begin anew. It follows thereof that freedom rests in a moment, not in the continuum, which is the embodiment of automatism, the chain of necessity. By being an initiating insertion into the automatic movement of nature, man is endowed with the capacity to *do* a beginning, to break into the course of events and do what could be but needn't have been. This constitutes the capacity for action, *the* political mode of active life. The ultimate political manifestation of this capacity is for Arendt the 'miracle of beginning', the act of founding a polity not as an edifice but as a living sphere of the in-between, the common in the sense of experience of plurality not in the sense of solid frameworks. The ultimate political is therefore contained in a rupturous moment of new beginning, which situates Arendt in a philosophical position radically opposed to that of the tradition: not only does she not seek a leap out of time but she situates the political in the worst of time, a fleeting, open-ended moment.

If action thus understood is taken for the core of the political, then the political is no longer about continuity but about discontinuity, it is no longer about administering and patterns of (mass) behaviour but about unique, spontaneous acts that displace the political outside the undisturbed temporal flow into a different time, broken time, of unexpected moments which entail the capacity to shatter the world or build it anew. Arendtian politics thus appears not only as different to the political of the prevailing Western tradition of political philosophy but as immersed in the worst of time, one

could almost say – radically temporalised through the centrality of the moment of action in Arendt’s theory of politics.

Arendt’s understanding of political moment becomes clearer in the light of Nietzsche’s moment, the self-contained moment which holds its own meaning: ‘it has no purpose outside itself, it leads to nothing but itself. Being is circular. Therefore, nothing outside the moment can serve to justify it...’⁸ Beiner here draws an important parallel between Arendt and Nietzsche, striking the central cord of Arendt’s political project when he argues that ‘circularity’ should in fact be read as the existential ‘autonomy’ of moment. Only in Arendt’s project, moment receives a specific and explicit political interpretation, perhaps most elaborate in her historical analysis of the emergence of a new polity from the American Revolution.⁹

The American Founding Fathers inhabited a peculiar historical situation, trapped between the Christian heritage of Absolutes and their own deed, the foundation of absolutely new, a new *body politic*, which had to be legitimated in order to be preserved and perpetuated. The inevitable problem of every new beginning has always been its arbitrariness, its need to justify its appearance, that new space opening where there was none and was a different one. Therefore what seemed impossible to the Founding Fathers was not investing the people, through their representatives in the legislatures, with law-giving power, but perceiving these same people as the sources of ‘higher law’, the law that bestows permanence upon once founded polity and its new laws. Arendt diagnoses this as the problem of deriving law and power from the same source. [OR, 183-184] In other words, the Founding Fathers were shunning away from the unprecedentedness of their own act. Their conceptual language and their thinking, unlike their action, continued to belong to the Judeo-Christian tradition of law as divine commandment, binding through its source dislocated from the realm of human will.

Through an exhaustive and minute textual analysis of Jefferson’s: “We hold these truths to be self-evident,” Arendt succeeds in capturing or rather, opening up, both

⁸ Beiner, interpretative essay in LKPP, p. 148.

⁹ This historical analysis, which constitutes the most elaborate and explicit Arendt’s statement of her own political project, discloses Arendt’s debt to Kant and Nietzsche for the idea of the political as an end-in-itself.

ambiguity and ambivalence of the historical moment of the revolution.¹⁰ On the one hand, the preceding reference to God and, even more importantly for the men of Enlightenment, *the Truth*, suggest that the transcendental is still allowed to appear within the political. Being self-evident, they resist any dispute by men, who are not their authors and have no power over altering that which has not come from their own will. On the other hand, and for Arendt's project more importantly, the phrase "we hold" is an opening towards understanding that political truths cannot 'posses the same power to compel as the statement that two times two make four.' [OR, 193] Yet it was clear to them, as actors, that the new law and new order were emerging neither through divine intervention nor through a neutral hand of a law-maker alien to the '*polis*' but through their own doing. In that sense, the doing becomes the ground on which it itself stands.

Arendt here draws a historical parallel with the Roman experience of political beginning, distinct both from the Greek and Christian beginning in legitimation through the act itself. Understanding the laws were as divine commandments, therefore – through appeal to transcendental authority, would have been alien and incomprehensible to Roman juristic philosophy:

[F]or Montesquieu, as for the Romans, a law is merely what relates two things and therefore is relative by definition, he needed no absolute source of authority and could describe the 'spirit of the laws' without ever posing the troublesome question of their absolute validity. [OR, 188-189]

¹⁰ "Focusing on the famous phrase, 'We hold these truths to be self-evident,' Arendt argues that the new regime's power, and ultimately its authority, derive from the performative 'we hold' and not from the constative reference to self-evident truths. Both dramatic and non-referential, the performative brings a new political community into being; it *constitutes* a 'we.' This speech act, like all action, gives birth, as it were, to the actor(s), in the moment(s) of its utterance and repetition.[...] For the sake of politics, for the sake of free political action, Arendt cleanses the declaration and the founding of their violent, constative moments, of the irresistible anchors of God, self-evident truth, and natural law. there is to be no 'being' behind this doing. The doing, the performance, is everything. On Arendt's account the real source of the authority of the newly founded republic was the performative not the constative moment, the action in concert not the isolated acquiescence, the 'we hold' not the self-evident truth. And the real source of authority in the republic, henceforth, would be the style of its maintenance, its openness to refounding and reconstitution." B. Honig, *Toward an Agonistic Feminism: Hannah Arendt and the Politics of Identity*, in J. Butler and J.W. Scott (eds), *Feminists Theorize the Political* [New York and London; Routledge, 1992], pp. 216-217. This passage sketches out B. Honig's reading of Arendt's interpretation which brings to light its performative dimension. However, the reading does not balance that vein of Arendt's interpretation against its counterpart, Arendt's profound awareness of ambiguity surrounding the act of Declaration, the hesitation of the Founding Fathers to declare the absolute newness of their act – absolute as totally new, unprecedented, but also absolute as absolved, in this case of transcendental grounding – but also their captivity in the conceptual framework of traditional political philosophy and its instrumental understanding of politics.

In Montesquieu, the Founding Fathers had one modern predecessor who, according to Arendt, was the only one among the pre-revolutionary (anterior to modern revolutions) theorists, therefore the only one without an immediate experience of a radical break and novelty in his political repository, who did not resort to or did not withdraw into the refuge of introducing ‘an absolute, a divine or a despotic power, into the political realm.’ [OR, 188] Montesquieu’s theory posits different ‘orders of laws’ which ought not interfere as they differ “in their origin, in their object, and in their nature.”¹¹ Human laws are therefore historicized by Montesquieu – they are subject to change unlike the religious laws that come from eternity and are meant for eternity. Further on, Montesquieu recovers the Roman Latin root of the word *law* in arguing that a relational dimension is inherent to the notion of law and legality: The character of laws is relational, in the sense that they themselves are relations,¹² but also through their relative nature – that they have to relate to various factors, such as the climate, population, other laws, etc of the polity. This relational character of laws renders any resort to absolute authority meaningless: the law precisely is not about substance but about relating, separating and distinguishing and demarcating the substantive.

The element of the relational is here ensured by men acting in concert and binding themselves to certain principles upon which they wish to see their political edifice erected. In Arendt’s theory of action, this specific act is related to the human capacity for making and keeping promises:

There is an element of the world-building capacity of man in the human faculty of making and keeping promises. Just as promises and agreements deal with the future and provide stability in the ocean of future uncertainty where the unpredictable may break in from all sides, so the constituting, founding, and world-building capacities of man concern always not so much ourselves and our own time on earth as our ‘successor’, and ‘posterities.’ [OR, 175]¹³

¹¹ Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws* (New York and London; Hafner Publishing, 1966), Book XXVI.

¹² The opening sentence of *The Spirit of the Laws* defines laws as ‘necessary *relations*.’

¹³ This is how Arendt deals with one of the two ills of action, its unpredictability. The other, its irreversibility is also remedied through a peculiar type of action, forgiveness, one act that ‘betrays’ expectations and disturbs the automatic flow of events, annulling the disturbing, even tragic, irreversibility of actions: “Forgiving... is the only reaction which does not merely re-act but acts anew and unexpectedly, unconditioned by the act which provoked it and therefore freeing from its consequences both the one who forgives and the one who is forgiven.” [HC, 241] To resort to vengeance means to take another step within the same course of expected events. To forgive however is to break the chain and start an altogether new course of events. [HC, 240-241] Therefore, the remedy against the irreversibility and unpredictability of the process started by acting ‘does not arise out of another and possibly higher faculty, but is one of the potentialities of action itself.’ [HC, 236-237]

If Arendt's theory of the political were to be confined to the centrality of action in contrast to lasting institutions, based on discontinuous temporality of moments, her political thought would be spared numerous tensions but would also make a contribution to political philosophy of limited originality. But this is against the spirit of Arendt's thinking: she is a thinker engaged in disclosing tensions, not necessarily resolving them, and not necessarily aspiring to resolving them. Thus her theory of the political is not only revolving around moments of rupturous actions as opposed to the permanence and continuity but she makes the claim that permanence, continuity in politics springs from discontinuity that ruptures inject into linear time flow. One witnesses here one of the peculiarly Arendtian twists of the common understanding, of habituated views. Namely, Arendt does not abandon the Roman-originated but widely accepted ideal of stability and permanence in the construction of polities – notwithstanding the proviso that political stability and permanence receive a peculiarly modern reinterpretation in the concept of 'process', the uninterrupted continuum in place of solid edifice, predictability and controllability in place of permanence and, ultimately, eternity. What she is actually doing when exposing the time-honoured tension between the stability and mutability, the forces of conservation and forces of change in the life of polities, she rejects the escape out of time, as the medium on change, into predictable immobility, and asserts (drawing on Montesquieu) that both permanence of laws and volatility of action are needed for the polity to grow and thrive, as both solid bones and running blood are needed for a body to exist – hence her frequent use of the term 'body politic.' But then she moves on to make even a stronger claim, the claim that permanence is embedded in the ephemeral, that conservation depends upon continued action. [BPF, 153]

This Arendt's claim is based on her understanding of promise as action and its relation to law(-making). Not only do the laws as sentinels of stability derive from the human capacity to make promises and keep them, a capacity that is a sub-category of human capacity for action as a beginning of new. Not only are the laws therefore nothing but written promises, of what the world is to be like, but the nature of continuity, argues Arendt, is discontinuous for it rests in continuous action, which interrupts a continuum of routine. This assumes a concrete political form in the instrument of constitution and

its amendments, which draws on the Roman notion of foundation and preservation as co-located in augmentation.

The very concept of Roman authority suggests that the act of foundation inevitably develops its own stability and permanence, and authority in this context is nothing more or less than a kind of necessary 'augmentation' by virtue of which all innovations and changes remain tied back to the foundation which, at the same time, they augment and increase. Thus the amendment to the Constitution augment and increase the original foundations of the American republic; needless to say, they very authority of the American Constitution resides in its inherent capacity to be amended and augmented. [OR, 202]

However the beginning that the American Revolution was is not venerated through the mystery of origin, the mystery which sheltered the sacredness of Roman beginnings. The beginning deliberately begun by concrete men in concrete historical circumstances and the remembrance of this act served to venerate it. The act of foundation 'became the fountain of authority in the new body politic,' and the guardian of its lastingness, without any recourse to transcendental authority. [OR, 204] With the foundation of polity occurring in historical time, as opposed to mythical, as a break in the continuum, appropriation of a certain gap of transition for the sake of staging a new beginning, the emerging polity liberated itself from the need for transmundane and atemporal absolutes: 'because this 'absolute' lies in the very act of beginning itself.' [OR, 204] The moment of new beginning abolishes the temporal continuum [OR, 206], it is inside and outside time, inside as it is witnessed by mortals in their time, it is not hidden in a divine void of time, it can be narrated and remembered; outside – because it is as if a new temporal sequence commences with it. What Arendt calls a problem of the beginning, 'an unconnected, new event breaking into the continuous sequence of historical time,' [OR, 205] the problem of beginning for which a source outside itself is sought, is no longer a problem once it is accepted that there is an inherent value to the (f)act of beginning.

Read in the context of her historical analyses, Arendt's dialogue with pre-modernity as well as the beginning of modernity appears not as a return to the past but as a project of developing a secular theory of the political in the absence of all absolutes or rather, at the moment of break with tradition on all planes of the public and the private, the active and the contemplative. Arendt returns not so much to the tradition of political

thinking¹⁴ as to the thread of political experiences, the incidents of the political erupting, to explore the old source of the political not because she believes that the gap can or even should be bridged or that the path ahead is actually path to the restoration of the political past, return to the pre-modern politics as thought and as done. Rather, to draw a Ricoeurian distinction, Arendt's dialogue with the past is not in the function of remembering as a passive capture of the past but active evocation through renovation.¹⁵ This is more than, and *other to*, a return to the roots of political experience, it is a return to the roots of the political *in* experience. It is a move that Arendt makes as a disciple of Heidegger, himself indebted to Husserl, a disciple both exposed and open to phenomenological teaching.

It is precisely through her involvement with political experiences of the past and the present that Arendt identified the principal problem of the political, a problem which transcends the historical framework of modernity stretching into the past as into the future but is particularly acute for modernity:

The real danger in contemporary societies is that the bureaucratic, technocratic, and depoliticised structures of modern life encourage indifference and increasingly render men less discriminating, less capable of critical thinking, and less inclined to assume responsibility.¹⁶

For her as a thinker of modernity in modernity, this is the main source of concern, and it is the force behind Arendt's inquiries in what one could tentatively delineate as the middle stage of her work, at the time when the world emerged from the Second World War and political communities were being re-built in the shadow of totalitarianism as the defining political experience or rather, the defining political fact of the first half of the 20th century. What is at stake here is nothing but the problem of grounding groundless politics or rather, in attempt to overcome the issue and philosophical horizon of the term 'ground,' it is the problem of non-transcendental, political sources of politics as action and not administration. The danger of the foundation arresting action was very present and visible for the actors of the American Revolution, who

¹⁴ In fact, Arendt harshly criticized the philosophical tradition from Plato to Marx in a number of her works, already from the *Origins of Totalitarianism*.

¹⁵ Ricoeur, Paul: Ricordare, dimenticare, perdonare: L'enigma del passato (Bologna; Il Mulino, 2004), p. 104.

¹⁶ Beiner, in LKPP, p. 113.

sensed both the fear *for* lastingness of the newly created polity and the fear *of* this polity as a grave for what brought it about – the revolutionary spirit or, in Arendtian economy, the spirit of action. [OR, 232] It is the question of why to be concerned with the world all, why engage politically with it – whatever the principles of such engagement. Why is our capacity for beginning at times silent and at times active? Is one simply to wait for the moment of action, the moment that presents itself or there is a way to call for such moment, to refuse to let the political affairs unravel without disturbance and to extract oneself from the tranquilizing flow of normalcy not by stepping out but by stepping in, by interrupting? Is it only the catastrophic situations ‘when the chips are down’ that wake us up to the world and our own doings?

Where the *miracle of beginning* comes from

As it has been pointed out, understanding man as a beginning drives Arendt to understand the source of political action outside the prevailing stream of the philosophical tradition. The early work on Augustine alerted Arendt to the initiatory dimension of human existence, which is embodied in the political realm as the beginning appears in the world firstly through birth and secondly through action. It is not that a man begins because of human capacity for action but man is a beginning by virtue of being, the existential/ontic is initiatory as opposed to the essential, that which has no beginning as it is always in-being, never becoming. Being through and as a beginning endows men with the capacity for action, which is the capacity for beginning anew against the channeled, indifferent flow of time.

In reply to the question what is born in this new beginning, Arendt would reply: it is time and again a world to be shared with other men who will act out their own moments of new beginnings. If new is to emerge, the chain of events and the automatic flow from one into another must be broken in a moment that is distinct, although not detached, from what preceded it and what will follow. In most of her writings on action, Arendt dwells on the ‘moment of action’ or a ‘fleeting moment of action’ which interrupts the mechanic translation of past into future, the blending, the flow of time: ‘It is in the nature of beginning that something new is started which cannot be expected from whatever may have happened before.’ [HC, 177-8]

The notion of ‘the miracle of beginning’ is clearly and explicitly derived from Christianity, the child born onto the world. [HC, 247] Throughout her writings, Arendt quotes Augustine’s thought: ‘that there be beginning, a man was created.’ In Arendt’s works, the miracle of beginning and its (religiously grounded) connection to birth merge in the concept of natality, the understanding of man’s existential situation not only through the (Heideggerian) condition of mortality but primarily through the fact of birth and thereof derived human capacity for action. The miracle (of beginning) is reinterpreted by Arendt outside its original religious framework to denote that which is not determined, that which happened although it needn’t have ever happened. From a biological fact of birth therefore, Arendt arrives at birth as the source of freedom. Following her ontology of action, through and in which freedom appears, we arrive at the conclusion that the meaning of natality is primarily political. The miracle of beginning is therefore a moment in which man, himself begun in the world, begins.

The answer that Arendt found in Augustine’s writings would eventually develop into Arendt’s own phenomenological conceptual framework for understanding the human condition. The source of Christian love for neighbour in this world lies beyond this world, in the divine creator of all beings. What connects men to one another is their common descent. But Arendt’s reading of Saint Augustine draws on a dimension of his thought and allows it to overgrow the initial theological framework and to speak to Arendt in her own philosophical and historical situation. Common origin of men as the source of care for the world, as it (the world) manifests itself in those who surround us, is reinterpreted by Arendt, whose philosophical horizon arises through the overcoming of transcendentalism started by Nietzsche and continued by Heidegger, as the commonness of human condition. It is the condition of *being born*, that is – passive appearance, appearance suffered, not acted out, and as a being born – being mortal as well. But it is also a condition of being born *of* and being born *to*, not in isolation:

Rooted means that no one can escape from the descent, and in this descent the most crucial determinant of human existence has been instituted once and for all. Thus, what united all people is not an accidental likeness. Rather, their likeness is necessarily founded and historically fixed in their common descent from Adam and in a kinship beyond any mere likeness. This kinship creates an equality neither of traits nor talents, but of situation. All share the same fate. The individual is not alone in this world. He has companions-in-fate, not merely in this situation or that, but for a lifetime. His entire life is regarded as a distinct fateful situation, the situation of mortality. [LSA, 100]

However, in her later works, Arendt the political theorist will have reworked considerably her idea of sharing and the shared at the core of the concern with the world. From the passivity of existential situation she moves to the dynamism of acting together, from Augustine's notion of common origin as the working of god-creator to the (originally Aristotelian) conception of civic friendship as sharing in the projects of action, that acting in concert which Arendt recognized in the situation of American founding fathers who were filled with 'sheer joy' at the decisive moment of constituting political community. Common origin or descent becomes commonly begun beginning.

The mind faculty which Arendt relates to beginning is Will. For Arendt, action, while spontaneous, cannot come *ex nihilo* and yet it cannot be pre-determined, it cannot be a necessity. Despite strong currents of Aristotelianism detectable in her thought, the source of the moment is therefore not intentionality but spontaneity, the organ of which is Will. [LM/II:110]

According to Arendt's trichotomy of the mind's activities, thinking does not move – no motion in the sense of action which appears in the world can be generated by the activity of intellect alone. For this reason, Arendt locates it in the one faculty of mind which corresponds to freedom – the faculty of willing, which is related not to necessary acts but those that could occur yet could also remain unacted. [LM/II:6-7]

Will in Arendt's economy is the faculty of decision between *yes* and *no*, against necessities, it is the faculty through which men renounce all givenness, the faculty which moves and changes unlike the faculty of thinking which compels to the facts but cannot initiate or direct the course of action. It is the specific capacity of Will to make things happen or rather, to allow for the appearance of ego in the light of the day. On this ground, Arendt can therefore argue that action is coming out of nothing – not nothing as *nihilo*, absolute absence or absolute negation of *presence* but negation of *appearance*, in the sense of nothing already apparent in the world because what precedes action is the *act* of Will, an act still residing only in the mind, which leaves the sphere of mind and comes out into the world only through the cessation of the *mental* activity of willing and the outset of something new brought (in)to the world.

Paradoxically though, through its own act, Will cancels itself as it cannot will and act at the same time. To will is always and already to nill. While willing, we are nilling until

we take a decision and act. Action interrupts the activity of will by closing off all other options through enactment of the chosen one. The origin of action is therefore in the principle of freedom, which the Will embodies – coming from freedom of the Will, each and every action could just as well not have happened. The Will wills it and nills, the Will says yes or no. Through this yes or no, the principle of freedom is acted out but at the same time freedom is no longer present in the action for it has been decided, action is located not in the space of willing *and* nilling but in the space of either/or. Anyone whirled around by the ebb and tide of willing can relate easily to this phenomenological portrait of the dual or more precisely – conflicting nature of the will, as well as to the description of relief that action brings about, cutting into these random and uncontrollable oscillations and overpowering the raving of the will.

Action appears like a sudden cut into mellowness of time flow, miraculously one could say, not from potentiality, as according to Aristotle, but against infinite improbabilities there comes an actuality.¹⁷ The moment of decision to act is unique: it could be – but it does not have to be. Thereof emerges the concept of responsibility as the burden of freedom.

But as it was the case with most of other thinkers of freedom and its initiatory dimension, Arendt's thought encountered the danger of arbitrariness entailed in every new beginning. Her uncompromising distinction between thinking and acting drew her into the *impasse*, what she called the abyss of freedom:

... it seems to tell us no more than that we are *doomed* to be free by virtue of being born, no matter whether we like freedom or abhor its arbitrariness, are 'pleased' with it or prefer to escape its awesome responsibility by electing some form of fatalism.

Once the ultimate implications of connection between capacity for action and the fact of natality are disclosed, freedom itself appears unfree and Arendt's argument is in danger of falling back into the pit of Hegelian dialectics of necessity and freedom, which she has criticized all throughout. In this coda, Arendt's thinking seems to ripen

¹⁷ According to Arendt's genealogical narrative, the concept of Will in the sense of unbound freedom, not in the sense of freedom of choice between pre-given options, remained unknown to Hellenic philosophy whose concept of time was cyclical. Will as the faculty of the new, of contingency, of the accidental, is inextricably tied to the rectilinear concept of time, for time as a cycle entails repetition by virtue of which something that was – *necessarily* will be once again. No such certainty exists for the project of Will. Willing is not a midwife to the birth of actuality out of potentiality – any potentiality in will can be or not, the only certainty is that – it does not *have to be*. [LM/II:16]. Arendt relates the appearance of the concept to the abandoning of cyclical conception of time and the rise of Christianity, when events and actions acquired irreversible uniqueness.

like grapes, which at the same time, just as it darkens to that particular crimson, also becomes most vulnerable to touch of hand or air or light, which here is embodied in the following question: Where could the moment of action come from, which dark corner, so that this dialectics of freedom and necessity is overcome, so that the moment can be called for by actor and not only befallen upon the actor? In Heidegger's terms, inevitably here simplified and crude, this would correspond to a passage from the inauthentic everydayness into the authentic existence, the facing of Being.

It is Arendt's observations from the Eichmann trial that led her to reconsider the case for political importance of thinking as a silent dialogue between me and myself. Namely, Arendt found that, as much as thinking is a solitary activity tied to the inner world, its disruptive dimension and its paralyzing effect may prevent or pre-empt catastrophes in the common world. In the moments when the chips are down, when the torrent of events threatens to sweep away everything and everyone, thinking may be one single path towards 'realizing what one is doing.' Arendt builds the argument that the ability to tell right from wrong is based on the ability to think, the argument that can account for her diagnosis of Eichmann's condition as the one of thoughtlessness, total submission to the habits and routine never scrutinized, never tested against the particularity of historical situation, blindly followed through. [LM/I:13]

At this point, an important thought-event in Arendt's work takes place: acting and thinking, which she all along keeps not only distinct and not only separated but in tension, touch. [RJ, 105] Namely, the paralyzing effect of thinking, the interruption of all other activities, for its basic condition is 'to stop and think,' which renders thinking and acting mutually exclusive. The condition of thinking man is solitude, away from world of appearances, the condition of actor is inevitably plurality for no action happens in a void, in isolation, but is effected by and responded to, consciously or unconsciously, directly or indirectly, by actions of others:

Action, in which a We is always engaged in changing our common world, stands in the sharpest possible opposition to the solitary business of thought, which operates in a dialogue between me and myself. [LM/II:200]

This phenomenological insight into the relationship between thinking and acting follows on Arendt's earlier normative postulate, explicated in other writings, that there ought not be such a link. Action is principled on freedom, which in man is embodied in

the spontaneous beginning of the new series in time, hence it cannot be equated with either execution of orders or fabrication upon pre-conceived designs. [HC, 223] To reduce action to the tight frame of means-ends categories, in a kind of revived Platonic project substituting of making and acting [HC, 225], would entail nothing less but annihilation of the distinctly human capacity for new beginnings, that meaning of human existence on earth. [LM/II:217]

Arendt's main concern in drawing the distinction between thinking and acting is preservation of the principle of freedom in action. Since it is this capacity for new beginning that is the *locus* of human freedom, if action is traded for certainty and safety of making, the principle of freedom is lost for the human world. The years of totalitarianism made Arendt exceptionally sensitive to any possibility of such loss. To merge the two would for Arendt mean to deprive men of freedom, which rests in the human capacity for action as the spontaneous, unheralded and unexpected beginning of the new always bearing a mark of the unique individual who acts, and replace it with fabrication. Thinking, as she often argued, especially if professional/philosophical, is uncompromising in its demand for consistency and logicity or to use a controversial, if not even devalued, term – truth. If a political equivalent were to be sought for truth, it would have been nothing else but dictatorship for truth is absolute, hence compelling, over truth there can be no argument. If action were to flow directly and automatically from thought, both the quality of spontaneity and uniqueness would be lost: spontaneity because action would be reduced to the execution of orders, based on the pattern preconceived by the mind; uniqueness - since the laws of thinking do not differ but are universal for all, each and every one of us would act in the same way under the same circumstances. In a nutshell, Arendt saw it as not only a philosophical but also a political project to keep the two distinct.

Yet what one has to avoid here is equating Arendt's distinction between thinking and acting with an uncompromising pre-modern distinction between active life and life of the mind. Even morphology of the terms that she employs for the faculties of mind and types of active life is curiously indicative in this sense. Namely, active life is differentiated into three categories: labour, work, action – all three straightforward and simple nouns, static. On the other hand, mind faculties do not retain the names from the

prevailing philosophical tradition but are given in the form of gerund, an active, verb-related noun, suggestive of motion, dynamic. Arendt's sensitivity to words, interaction between their form and meaning, precludes a presumption of coincidence in this case. Rather, it is an indication of her movement towards the bridging of the gap between active life and the life of the mind. The merger is located in the moment, to put it in Arendt's much loved and much revisited phrase: 'when the chips are down,' the decisive moment, the moment when a storm is in the air or has even already started, the moment the coming of which can sometimes be heard like ticking of the time-bomb that is the future in the present. [OV, 18]

In one of the most explicit and most suggestive passages on what this moment meant, at the end of the first volume of *The Life of the Mind*, the phrase unfortunately fell prey to the over-sensitive editing pen of Mary McCarthy. McCarthy accounts for this intervention through an aesthetically grounded justification:¹⁸

I cannot say why the phrase grates on me, and particularly coming from her, who, I doubt, ever handled a poker chip. But I can see her (cigarette perched in holder) contemplating the roulette table or *chemin de fer*, so it is now 'when the stakes are on the table' – more fitting, more in character. [LM/II:248]

It is difficult to argue with this close friend (and associate) of Arendt's over this image, for what remains after the deceased is a crystallized memory, in Arendt's own words: 'it is as though all non-essential qualities perished with the disappearance of the body in which they were incarnated. The dead are 'enshrined' in remembrance like precious relics of themselves.' [LM/II:182] But while the image of the stakes on the table may denote the same gambling situation, the same entrapment of men in the workings of Fortuna or human condition in the universe ruled by a 'God who plays dice', Einstein's allegoric phrase which Arendt also loved quoting [LM/II: 196], Arendt's original choice connotes something more. The chips embody, or stand for, stakes but their conversion back into stakes retains an element of surprise, of unpredictability, what initially went into the chips may not be the same that will come out. More importantly, when chips are on the table, Fortuna is not the only force at work. Around the *table* - another Arendt's metaphor, one that she found to fit perfectly her understanding of the common world as bringing together men but without encroaching upon the distance

¹⁸ In the earlier series of lectures *Some Questions of Moral Philosophy*, much of which constitutes the core of the volume on thinking, the phrase was retained. See p. 40 and p. 78 of RJ.

which protects their unique individuality [HC, 54] – there are seated men, with playing cards in their hands, as they have been dealt to them but also with their skills, their principles, and, for Arendt perhaps most importantly, their own judgment of the situation and capacity to decide upon their action.

To draw further on this phrase ‘when the chips are down,’ the stakes contained in chips are never clear – there is no limit to whatever they may turn into. They deceive or delude – the chips represent the absent stakes but they may under-represent or over-represent. And it is easily overlooked that they *are* the stakes, but it is an asymmetrical relationship of identity, the stakes are not chips. In a paradoxical twists and turns of the game, the only constant is this openness of the chips. Their vastness, their volume is unlimited, just as the outcome of catastrophes is boundless, potentially world-shattering. How players respond to this destructive openness of the game is linked to their capacity for thinking, a capacity inherent to all men but not employed by all. Thinking that, as Athens argued against Socrates, dissolves all norms and conventions is what limits the conduct of those caught in the whirl of historical circumstances when the only remaining rule is that all rules are perverted and/or abandoned. Those who always act only upon the rules, those that allow to be guided through and through by conventions absorbed without questioning, are the first ones to unlearn the rules of the moral conduct. There is nothing to tell them that the chips are down and what is at stake in the chips. To what they can do, there are then no limits because those who are not used to listen to the voice within them, the voice that makes them face in all the clarity their past deeds, have nothing to prevent them from doing virtually anything unless there are externally imposed constraints.

By contrast, the ones used to questioning are the ones who never rely on the external standards and who will take the state of no-rule with the same grain of salt as the state of rule. To understand how this is to prevent one from doing harm it must be remembered what thinking through involves for Arendt – the (Socratic) encounter with oneself. When the world is left outside, as it happens in thinking, there emerges myself, the one person that I cannot escape and I cannot hide from when alone. As challenging as the appearance in the public may be, one appears as one wishes to be seen. But to oneself one appears only as one is or one does not appear at all, one remains concealed in inner silence or covered up by the publicness. That one is the one

that awaits us on arrival home from the world, argues Arendt, and asks whether we would want to be awaited by a murderer or a thief. And here it is most visible, in her most purely philosophical writing, how Arendt's language remains intertwined with Heidegger's, only without Heidegger's hierarchical implications of the dichotomy between the authentic and the inauthentic, in this presumed dynamics of the revealing and concealing publicness, and the silent encounter with someone that *is* because that someone *has become* such through one's own history. The one that we meet is not our essence, it is not a given one but the witness of our past. The myself that we find in solitude is the self remembering our deeds. So whatever we have put in the self is what we shall find when we retreat into thinking. Consequently, thinking is relevant for action only in those catastrophic situations when the world is crumbling but the actor is ultimately impotent and thinking may save him/her from taking part in the shattering of the world. Clearly however, thinking then leads not to action but to non-action, restraint from action. The appearance of thinking in the world is in the absence of action, argues Arendt.

Only, the problem arises in terms of 'doing right,' and not only not doing wrong. It is the movement from Socrates to Christ, or rather, as Arendt insists, to Jesus of Nazareth. As Arendt knew, perhaps better than many of her contemporaries, politics was not only about pre-empting catastrophes or rather – it is almost not at all about pre-empting catastrophes for the latter is often done through restraint from action, through non-action rather than action. And here we are again at the point of the tacit Heidegger's question in Arendt's political thought, the question of the source of the moment of engagement with the world.

The undertones of this Arendt's concern are Heideggerian. It is the same concern with passing from the (political) inauthentic to the (political) authentic, from ordinary to extraordinary from oblivion in everyday routinized administration of human affairs to awareness of the world as something not given but in need of being cared for. How this insertion into time, the razor-cut that is the moment, how it is to be called for and not only received by virtue of the ontological relationship between human condition of natality and human capacity for action, between the state of being born into the world as a unique novelty and the response to this state through bringing the new into the world?

Interestingly enough, the one path to an answer that Arendt maps out replies to the corresponding question in the sphere of ethical conduct, not political action. In a brief critique of a paper on collective responsibility, among her later writings (1968) Arendt tackles the problem of doing good but makes it clear that she cannot speak about it in political terms - only ethical. [RJ, 112] This would suggest that Arendt, as already noted a thinker inclined to dichotomies, insists on the (Machiavellian) separation of the ethical and the political. However, what comes out of Arendt's discussion of ethicality in relation to politics is that the specific ethics (or rather, morality – the term that illuminates the vital etymological link between the concept and the Latin *mores* – customs, conventions, historically contingent therefore) of Christianity is incompatible with the political. In Christianity, while there remains the notion of *amor mundi*, it is mediated through the love of God. It follows that there is no value inherent to the world which could compromise a Christian's detachment from it, the detachment necessary for nearing God and spending one's life in God. The care of a Christian is always primordially and primarily the care for one's soul, to which the world must be sacrificed.¹⁹

Caught between the impasse of Will or the fatality of freedom and recourse to the transcendental sources of engaging with the world, Arendt introduces the third mental faculty – judgment, as the capacity which preserves non-instrumental character of action and the principle of freedom but also the notion of responsibility. We read on from Arendt:

This impasse, if such it is, cannot be opened or solved except by an appeal to another mental faculty, no less mysterious than the faculty of beginning, the faculty of Judgment... [LM/II:217]

The judging moment

In Arendt's thinking, the faculty of judgment was conceived (of) as the bridge between the whirlwind of our free will on the one hand, and on the other - the world into which we had been thrown and into which our will continues to 'throw' our actions. Judgment

¹⁹ In this light, it becomes clear what for Arendt kept returning and then again abandoning her very first work, her dissertation on Saint Augustine, [LSA, 119-120] where she for the first time asked the question why men should care for the world. I believe that she had been drawn to Saint Augustine in search for an answer but retreated because his concept of love of the world, *amor mundi* was religiously based, mediated through the love of God, something that modernity, situated in the yawning gap between past/tradition and future, could not sustain.

is what allows us to be our unique selves but be so in the community with others, on the basis of certain common understanding that is both made possible by the existence of community and perpetuates the existence of community.

When Arendt introduces the pivotal concept of judgment, more or less visibly present in her earlier, predominantly political works, central to her late writings, she hopes to bridge the gap between thinking in solitude and acting in plurality, overcoming both the paralysis of thinking and raving boundlessness of action. Judgment, which she considered a particular strength of her theory of political action, is brought in to resolve the problem of the dangerous spontaneity of action without endangering freedom. In the interpretative literature, one finds the same argument predominating: notwithstanding the fact that any interpretation of Arendt's theory of judgment must contain traces of speculations since her work remained unfinished, her concept of judgment as an autonomous mental faculty is taken for a reconciliation of various conflicting strands in her thought.²⁰ It is one faculty that conjoins actor and spectator, the one who acts out an event and the other who arrives at its meaning. Yet Arendt's understanding of the faculty of judgment seems to embody certain inherent contradictions while its reconciliatory role remains limited.

Judgment is clearly the most political of three mind faculties. Its origin in Arendt's work rests on her idea of political thinking or representative thinking. As she explicates, the intellectual source of this concept is however remote from the sphere of political thought, its roots firmly embedded in Kant's aesthetics. Central to Kant's understanding of how we appropriate beauty, how we see it as just that, the beauty, is the concept of taste, and he initially planned to write a *Critique of Moral Taste*. [LKPP, 10] Central to the concept of taste is not the idea of a solitary thinker but the idea of a man, any man, living among men and aspiring to win their approval. When an opinion is being formed, when beautiful is being distinguished from ugly, it is not the laws of truth that concern us but the acceptance by those among whom we live and upon whom we are making a claim to confirm our opinion.

For this however, since it is not a claim of universally valid truth but a claim of opinion by a particular man in particular circumstances of a historical community, there can be no absolute rules. Judgment, argues Arendt, is what helps us to deal with particular

²⁰ See Beiner's essay in LKPP and Kohn's introduction to RJ.

situations, situations which cannot simply be subsumed under universal principles, and such are all situations of human interaction for all human actions are generated by the particularity of each individual, corresponding to what is most unique in each and every one of us, rooted in the faculty of free will which can will an act and which can null it and until the action is taken, there is no premonition what it would be. And once it has been taken, there is no premonition what its final outcome will be as it will depend on equally unpredictable actions of others.

Most important for understanding Arendt's concept of judgment is its derivative connection to Kant's notion of *sensus communis*, to being in a community, with others. In deciding on particular situations, argues Arendt, we exercise enlarged mentality, we re-present to ourselves others that surround us. This is done through another faculty, closely linked with that of judgment, the faculty of imagination, which enables us to take the place of others and on that basis claim their assent to the opinion we formulate. [RJ, 139-140] We are not by ourselves and we do not decide only for ourselves. By exercising our judgment, we reach not only inside, into ourselves, we reach also towards others, imagined or re-presented others and instead of listening to the inner self, we engage in an internalized debate with other positions, other arguments.²¹ We take distance from ourselves and through this enlarged mentality, we form our position, we pass a judgment, which is not objective but is no longer subjective either – it is intersubjective, [RJ, 141] like a river that is not all its tributaries but, once they have flown into it, it no longer is the original stream from the mountain spring either. This then is the measure of right and wrong, the measure of one's conduct.

²¹ It would not be difficult to argue that Arendt is a thinker of distinctions. Non-distinguishing, blending of concepts and categories for her is related to a certain indifference to the world, refusal to judge as a danger of equating everything with everything which transforms or rather, degrades the world shared by unique human beings into the marshes inhabited by indistinct creatures that are not persons and not be a person for Arendt equals not being a *moral* person. [RJ, 100-101] Henceforth emerges her life-long insistence on purifying, crystallizing concepts as well as historical events. But acknowledging her insistence on distinctions is only one part of the story. Another part, no lesser in importance, is to recognise that she is not a thinker of singularity. For, once she has carefully established meticulous distinctions, she seems eager to blur the boundaries once again. In Arendt's philosophy, all concepts retain inherent plurality as one of Arendt's principal philosophical claims resists purity of singularity in anything related to men, anything of men or by men for plurality is for Arendt the condition properly human. It is also true of the inner life of men. Thus the thinking splits one into two or joins two-in-One, thus willing is always also nilling and, ultimately, judgment is representative thinking, thinking by one in the place of many.

As with thinking, the importance of judgment is truly sensed when there seems to be nothing general to hold on to. To decide between wrong and right, argues Arendt, it is not enough to hold on to the rules as if it were a matter of table manners. What one holds on to, is examples. Example is neither particular nor general but the particular that has acquired validity for other particulars, it has become something of a guide or, to employ Arendt's analogy, a schema. [RJ, 143-144] As a schema, the particular historical person who acquires exemplary validity, loses as irrelevant the traits that defined it as a person, loses the depth and totality of an inhabitant of historical place and time, and becomes an epitome of one virtue or vice, something of a metaphor in flesh and blood of that virtue or vice which allows us to recognize, without rules, these political and/or moral virtues and vices as such.

However the reconciliatory role of judgment is undermined by three problematic elements of this concept as constructed by Arendt. Firstly, the concept of taste, on which Arendt's concept of judgment rests, is directly linked with the capacity for appreciation, which she criticizes as derived from passive enjoyment and undermining the autonomy of judgment. It is the ominous presence of conformity, rooted in the concept of enlarged mentality by the legacy of the originary concept, the arche-concept of taste wherefrom judgment is derived by Kant. Judgment is thus at least potentially in danger of descending into conformism, compromising the independent thinking that guides one out of the traps of clichés and conventions or out of the situations when all rules have been dissolved.

On another account, enlarged mentality as the basis of judgment also renders the seemingly firm conceptual fabric porous and vulnerable. Judgment is invested with the gathering capacity, it is the *locus* of the inescapable inter-subjectivity in the subject: enlarged mentality that re-presents other (not only the Other) in the mind of the same, disrupting the unity of consciousness. To exercise judgment is to call into presence community. To call an absent community into presence through judging already implies a decision on *assuming* a community, even if absent, a decision already political and problematic. It is always a specific community that is re-presented in the mind, not all communities in all times, a community which is defined through its borders as much as its substance, that is through the criterion of inclusion/exclusion. It

is not simply a re-presented community but a community assumed, tangible, of definable borders, around those who are *allowed* to be present in re-presentation.

Finally, Kant maintained that our egoism is overcome precisely through disinterested thinking or enlarged mentality. This is supposed to explain *how* we can act in concert with other members of the community. But how this common sense, the formation of opinion through representative thinking is to be translated into *the sense of the common* is something that one found missing in Arendt's theory of judgment. In Arendt's concluding remarks to the essay on *Some Questions of Moral Philosophy*, she aptly warns of the 'real' danger:

In the unlikely case that someone should come and tell us that he would prefer Bluebeard for company, and hence take him as his example, the only thing we could do is to make sure that never comes near us. But the likelihood that someone would come and tell us that he does not mind and that any company will be good enough for him is, I fear, by far greater. Morally and even politically speaking, this indifference, though common enough, is the greatest danger. And connected to this, only a bit less dangerous, is another very common modern phenomenon, the widespread tendency to refuse to judge at all. Out of the unwillingness or inability to choose one's examples and one's company, and out of the unwillingness or inability to relate to others through judgment, arise the real *skandala*, the real stumbling blocks... [RJ, 146]

Interestingly enough, one way towards an answer to this question and to overcoming of the other two neuralgic points of judgment may be pointing to an encounter, a serendipitous and unconscious encounter of Arendt with another thinker, who, perhaps inadvertently or simply implicitly, thought the political while thinking the ethical: Levinas. In his notion of time as the Other, there is a seed of acting-towards-common as a response to the condition of temporality. But if we draw on Arendt's definition of thinking as the dialogue with oneself in a gap between past and future that is spaced to last, not mysteriously extracted out of time and placed in some eternal now but simply reigned by the 'out-of-orderness' of thinking that is not constrained by the world of appearances, the Other that is faced in the future is not the other Other, it is the self. Not an imagined or imaginary or constructed self but self-the-doer-of-deeds, which is Arendt's concept of the subject as always an actor, now as the Other, the one over whom the being has no mastery since the being-in-the-present cannot be one with the being-in-the-future, for whom the present of the decision will be the immutable past of the future. For, as Augustine wrote:

Time is not inert. It does not roll through our senses without affecting us. Its passing has remarkable effects on the mind. See: it came and went "from day to day," and by

us coming and going it implanted in me new hopes and other experiences to be remembering.²²

From this capacity of thinking the present as the past, if from anywhere, the action *may* come.

This self-as-the-Other is found already in Arendt's inquiry into thinking and its relation to moral considerations. Thinking opens an interval in the automatic flow of events, a space within ever-running time where one- encounters -self projected into future: the actor-to-be meets face-to-face her present that will have a future and a past. At the same time, she retains a memory of the world, in the awareness of her own natality, the past that bore a seed of her present and her future. What has to be emphasized here is the distinction between the call to presence of a community, specific and delineated, and this memory of the world, as the ethico-political horizon in potential, as a potential of a community but no community in particular, that which continues to exist through men even when the community is shattered, that which gives meaning to past, present, future.

The link thus restored between thinking and action escapes totalitarian tendencies (i.e. the substitution of making for acting) for the thought appears not as a model for action but as an *open* question of what will become of the deed. Action is not an execution of a design, harnessed to the objectives predetermined by thought but an answer to this open question with whom one would live the future – with the doer of this particular deed. That is the redefined relationship between thinking and acting, thought beyond the dichotomy but also beyond instrumentalisation of acting, as question and answer, autonomous yet inter-related through the act of decision.

Looking into the human condition of temporality as a source of the political does not run against the intuition of Arendt's project as it actually follows an undercurrent in Arendt's dialogue with the sources of the political throughout history of political experiences and communities. Through her theory of the political as action, Arendt has therefore pointed to the importance of inquiry into *human condition*, neither transcendental laws of universe nor essentialist notions of human nature. This however is more than a matter of methodology. It is a *philosophical decision*, albeit remaining

²² Augustine, Confessions, Book IV, VII (13)

undeveloped in Arendt's own work, to locate the sources of the political in the very human condition, the condition under which men exist on earth, under which the existence itself is given to them, moderns as well as pre-moderns, and therefore immune to the destruction by the doings of men, something that continues to generate political engagement as the engagement with the world, something that would be the source of the *concern for* the world unmediated through the religious care for the soul, something that endows world with an inherent value, not merely as the appearance of the divine creative power.

This path in reconstructing Arendt's theory of judgment does not run against the grain of Arendt's thinking but in fact follows an undercurrent in her own thinking of the 'elementary problems of human living together:' conversing with the origins of political experience in ancient Greece, Arendt brings to the surface from the depths of oblivion the idea of acting together, which is a way of not only being in the world with others but, to Hellenes even more importantly, of immortalizing that world, perpetuating it in time. It is the idea of the political as emerging from a specific relating to the human condition of temporality. In Arendt's inquiry into the human condition, through her encounters with Greeks and Romans, there emerges an intimation of political community, understood in terms of both institutions and actions, as a response to the ruinous flow of time, to the temporality of human condition in two of its principal characteristics – finitude and mutability. And one arrives at a simple yet surprising conclusion: from antiquity to modernity, one fact remains inescapable for human beings – temporality of their condition and its relation to the political, temporality of human condition as that which inspires, provokes, propels, threatens, redeems the engagement with the world:

Through many ages before us... men entered the public realm because they wanted something of their own or something they had in common with others to be more permanent than their earthly lives. [HC, 55]

The immortalizing function of politics in antiquity was a historically contingent response to the fact of human temporality. As Arendt argues, the concern with immortality of the world and self faded in modernity as the life process was elevated to the position of the highest good, the process which is by definition perpetual as long as the species lasts. [HC, 319] What does remain however is thinking as living with one's

own memory of oneself, which is imagined in the interval preceding decision. In that interval, the world may have crumbled down and the Other denied any recognition in the absolute and total negation to the point of (Schmittean) existential negation, but it all matters not as one absent can still be made present through imagination, through this *enlarged temporality*, the absent which is not the Other or others but the self burdened with the past that is the present of the thinking interval. In this *intervalla lucida*, the past comes from the future so that the future is no longer an open and unknown horizon but a time burdened with events consequent to the moment of the present. One meets oneself as the doer of a specific deed and thus a companion with whom the one from this present will have to live in the future (co)responding to the certain, irredeemable past of the one who did. Over this self under this past, one has no power, no mastery. The future of the self comes from the past that is immutable.²³ It is therefore not the prospect of death that awakes one (Heidegger), and not the fact of one's birth (Arendt) but the prospect of life or rather, of *living* as a duration in the company of the one that at the interval of thinking is deciding on what past one's future will be invested with. From this 'enlarged temporality' as an internal dialogue with one's present as the past seen from the future, the going out of oneself in time, there may come an impulse for a moment in which the community appears through Nancyian 'singularity touching,' as a memory of the world through the projection into the future. Historical condition of post-totalitarianism may prove particularly pre-disposed for this through its heritage of fatigued, wasted obsession with progressive future and the concourse with the past open to reinterpretation but closed to intervention. Modernity before the concentration camps revolved around the notion of progressive future. The experience of the ultimate experience, the one that transcended the limits of experience and challenged even the definition as it meant not a step into the unknown but a push into the abyss, this experience stopped the History, not bringing it to an/the end but denying it future.

²³ This is not to say that the past cannot be reinterpreted, it does not suggest the closure of the past which Ricoeur fears (2003) but the past seen from the present imagining future is unchangeable, the imagination in the present is limited by the presence of present, a reinterpretation of the past can only come once this present withdraws before another present that now is a future, one of the futures. For reinterpretation of the past is nothing but movement away from the givenness, dislocation of the immediate, familiar and close, into a distance which changes the perspective. Yet it begins only once there was a deed to be reinterpreted, once that-to-be-reinterpreted *was* as opposed to *is* or *will be*. In this (paradoxical) sense, it is reinterpretation that is the opening which requires the definite closure.

History at the moment of the concentration camps does not end but it dies as a motion. Future is no longer an open and unknown duration but a time burdened, duration conspicuously present in en-durance. The future has become not the open unknown but that, that will bring back the present as the irreparable past. To this call of what will be one's past, action as a denial of not-doing responds. Responsibility is to the self as the past, the one self that cannot be changed nor escaped thus the self as the Other, the inescapable ethicality of a human being always turned outwards, always exposed.

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- EIU = Essays in Understanding, 1939-1954, edited by J. Kohn (New York: Harcourt, 1994)
- HC = The Human Condition (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1958/1998)
- OR = On Revolution (London, New York: Penguin Books, 1965/1990)
- MDT = Men in Dark Times (New York: Harcourt, 1968)
- OV = On Violence (New York: Harcourt, 1970)
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