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Hannah Arendt and the Concept of Political Thinking

By

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This dissertation is dedicated to my Father, Shehab Alwahaib. With each passing day I realize more how much he lives within me, and how great a shadow he casts over my life. He may not have believed that I understood all that he did for me, but I do now. I want to thank him for always being there for me when I needed him. Because of him, I have become a better person than I may have without him.

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## ABSTRACT

Many claim that Hannah Arendt's political thought was developed through various stages, and that this development took place through various confrontations with topics such as ideology, totalitarianism and her concerns with the so-called "Jewish question". Arendt's political thought is usually characterized by an early emphasis on the priority of the political over that of the mind. In other words, her work is usually read as emphasizing the priority of the mode of living-with-others; action, over the solitary activity of thinking. This 'early' emphasis on the priority of politics goes hand in hand with her rejection of all transcendent standards or truths in the sphere of politics. Arendt's later writings, which were devoted mainly to the life of the mind, are usually read as a reversal of thought: a priority of thinking over action. Arendt's alleged reversal of thought took place through her witnessing the trial of the war criminal Adolph Eichmann whose crime, Arendt suggested, sprang from the fact of thoughtlessness. Arendt's new emphasis on the priority of thinking is supposedly something for which her early works made no provision. Almost contradicting everything she believed in before, Arendt's new 'political thinking' allows the introduction of truth and transcendental standards into the political realm.

I believe that the above interpretation does not do justice to Arendt's political thought. To introduce the distinction between 'early' and 'late' into her works obscures above all the continuity of her thought. I believe that there is a unifying thread that runs through Arendt's main works whether 'early' or 'late.' I call this unifying thread 'political thinking.' Careful analysis of Arendt's 'early' thoughts on politics shows a considerable emphasis on the importance of thinking in relation to politics or action. It is this specific kind of thinking, political thinking, that does justice to both, the demands of the mind on one hand, and the demands of experience on the other. I explore the development of 'political thinking' in Arendt's major writings beginning from her doctoral dissertation on Rahel Varnhagen to her final thoughts on *The Life of the Mind*.

## INTRODUCTION

Hannah Arendt once said in describing political western tradition, “Our tradition of political thought had its definite beginning in the teachings of Plato and Aristotle. I believe it came to no less definite end in the theories of Karl Marx.”<sup>1</sup> What is common among these philosophers, she believes, is their approach to the political sphere. To all of them, with varying degrees of course and in different contexts, politics is the domain of vulnerability, unpredictability and contingency. In other words, ‘truth’ can never be found in ordinary political practices. Thus, Plato turned against the *Polis* and became confident that if there would be a remedy for politics then philosophers must become politicians or politicians become philosophers. He believed that the reform of politics must come from a vision of truth. One can find the same approach in Aristotle although with less confidence in ‘truth’. The moderns committed the same mistake as Plato because they also imagined some laws, to be sure, absolute laws according to which history progresses. Such laws are believed to be valid, beyond any doubt and discoverable by reason alone. From hence they held that the movement of history is necessary and predictable. The result of the modern’s doctrines with regard to the relation between thought and action is similar to the despotic one of Plato. It is true that the moderns emphasized the role of experience and so they seem to overcome the dualism between transcendent truth and historical contingency. However, Arendt believes, modern political theories as well as the ancient are one and the same; they both resulted in undermining what is truly human in the sphere of politics, freedom. They both tend to overlook the real value of politics by judging it from the vantage point of Reason.

Arendt’s analysis of freedom in relation to what threatens it goes hand in hand with her analysis of some key notions such as plurality and action: the sphere of plurality is the sphere that allows everyone’s freedom to be established or revealed through action. She believed that every human being has an identity or a life story that is so unique that it can never be duplicated. The ontological foundation of such unique identity, she argues, is the fact of natality or of giving birth to a new person. This genuine existence of *someone* can be revealed through the practice of freedom, that is, in acting and speaking

among other unique and free individuals. Arendt celebrates the sphere of politics, called the *vita activa*, since it is the sphere where individuals reveal their unique selves through ‘action.’ Such celebration of action has some implications with regard to ‘truth’ and history. Truth, traditionally understood by political philosophers, does not deserve its historical exaltation since it is usually held by ‘professional thinkers’ and not the rest of the citizens. If something is to be praised then it must be the *opinions* of ordinary people, i.e., their unique and different ways of seeing and assessing their affairs. Thus, the commitment to Truth in the realm of absolute standards of the philosophers must be replaced with a commitment to our different opinions in the realm of human affairs. The implication of the exaltation of action with regard to history is that history is inherently unpredictable—something which is contrary to the modern belief that history somehow progresses according to some laws. These implications will be seen in more detail as the development of Arendt’s thought is analyzed.

Most commentators believe the works of Arendt can be viewed as an attempt to describe and analyze some of the basic problems of politics. One of these problems is the disastrous effects of theory, or intellectual thinking, on the realm of politics, the realm where genuine freedom must be found. Although her attempt to rescue freedom from the implications of theory is obviously ‘theoretical’, it is important to see that her approach is not corrupted by any theoretical prejudice to a significant extent--something that forced her analysis into introducing some new terms or new meanings for traditional terms. Perhaps she wanted to distance herself from the tradition by introducing such terms. In the works of Arendt that will be discussed later, we will see clearly how she refused to measure the worth of the political realm by the standards of contemplation or the *vita contemplativa*.

Arendt’s *theoretical* encounter with all forms of intellectualistic bias, including ideology and totalitarianism, with regard to politics is the subject matter of this dissertation. Upon a closer look at her works one can see clearly that her thoughts on this subject had undergone some developments in many directions over the years. Beginning with the works on the so-called Jewish question to her final unfinished work on thinking, *The Life of the Mind*, I will give an account of this development through a survey of these major works. I also intend to answer the general question of whether Arendt succeeded in

this project, namely, the possibility of *thinking* about politics without any commitment to a transcendent view of world-order.

In fact, commentators largely disagree about answering the above question. Some tend to believe that her alliance with action was abandoned later in her life while other commentators believe that she maintained the same attitude throughout her life. I would like to ‘speculate’ about the reasons for these disagreements. I believe that there are three main reasons for such great disagreements and controversies. The first is due to the fact that most commentators were so selective in reading the works of Arendt. Most commentators tend to examine only one or two of her works as an expression of her final thoughts and consequently draw conclusions which might not be supported by her other works.

The second reason for the existing scholarly disagreements about Arendt is that her works became a good battleground for different political views in Israel and the United States in particular. It is not an uncommon belief that the works of Arendt are ‘politically’ abused. We know that Arendt was involved in Jewish politics earlier in her life and, not surprisingly, she had friends and foes. She contributed a lot of writing on the present so-called mid-east problem--the problem that produced nothing but massacres and violence for more than fifty five years; somehow Arendt predicted these horrific consequences! She believed that a just solution to the Jewish question must not be a ‘Jewish state’ but a ‘Jewish homeland’, a kind of bi-national state where the native Arabs can live in peace with Jews. Unfortunately, the mid-east problem is unsolved and still fanatically discussed. The present political debates over the mid-east problem among politicians tend to find its echo in the works of today’s scholars. Most of the present literature on Arendt suffers from its intentional or may be unintentional ‘politicization’ of Arendt which results directly in weakening or distorting her general argument.

The last reason for such disagreements is due to the nature of Arendt’s works and her different concerns throughout these works. Arendt, for those who are familiar with her biography, has traveled intellectually between so many ‘islands’ of thought. She began her life with pure philosophical concerns. This is not surprising when we look at her academic background. She inherited the tradition of German philosophy through her education in German universities. She was a distinguished pupil and lover of Martin

Heidegger in Marburg and later in Heidelberg a student and a lifetime friend of Karl Jaspers. It is under the supervision of Jaspers that she wrote her first doctoral dissertation, *the Concept of Love in St. Augustine*. For most of the time she spent in universities Arendt did not show any interest in political matters. However, when the Nazis rose to power in Germany, Arendt tells us, it was the occasion that made it possible for her to face the fact of her ‘Jewishness’—the vehicle that escorted her into politics. The hostility of the Nazis towards Jews, as well as other minorities, turned Arendt’s attention towards politics and ‘action’. She was intensely engaged in Jewish politics and Zionism. In the middle of all these events, Arendt declared her divorce from all forms of traditional philosophizing: “I left Germany [escaping from the Nazis] dominated by the idea...Never again! I shall never again get involved in any kind of intellectual business. I want nothing to do with that lot.” This period of time that she spent involved in Jewish politics is marked by a number of articles on the so-called Jewish question and parts of her famous work, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. This latter work marks a transition from her purely Jewish concerns to thinking about the nature of the political realm. After she had settled in America she began to theorize about politics in general—her major work of that period is *The Human Condition*. This work provides us with a clearer view of what she means by politics and action. She tells us that action is the supreme human activity since it reveals human freedom. Later in her life she became interested in problems concerning thinking. In this final period of her life she attempted writing her book *The Life of the Mind* but she died before completing the final chapter of that book. Such disjunctions in Arendt’s life as well as her philosophical concerns do in fact contribute to some of the problems facing commentators on Arendt. One of these problems is the inability to grasp the unifying thread among her different works—works that range in scope from purely political matters to works that are preoccupied with metaphysical thought.

This short sketch of the events in Arendt’s life should help to understand how these events shaped her thoughts. I do not advocate the thesis of sociological determinism; however, there are some social events that she tried to *understand* or *react* to. Such is the case with her Zionist activities in reaction to the Nazis as well as her relatively stable life upon arrival in America which helped her to develop her understanding about politics ‘in general’. Thus, I believe that failure is the fate of any

attempt that argues for the exaggerated claim that there is continuity in her entire thought throughout her life or the other analogous claim that her thought at each period of her life must be viewed in itself apart from her other works at different periods. I hope to offer a reading of Arendt that does not fall within these two categories. I believe there is continuity in Arendt's thought but *only* with regard to her struggle with ideologies, theoretical thinking, or general political 'philosophizing' as a result of her sympathetic appreciation of the political. Arendt's way of dealing with this subject became her most important contribution of to political theory. As mentioned earlier, my project will trace her thoughts on this subject and the developments it undergone. I will give an account of this development through a survey of her major works at every stage in her life beginning with her turn into politics.

One complication to my proposed strategy is that most commentators believe that Arendt changed her views later in life; they believe that she lost interest in the political realm and was forced to 'accept the imperatives of thought'. The belief that Arendt changed her mind about the primacy of action relies on a special reading of her report on the Nazi war criminal Adolph Eichmann. The change in Arendt's thought, commentators argue, is implied in her attitude towards Eichmann which took the form of the primacy of thought over action. To recall the story of Eichmann, Arendt characterized his crime by his inability to think, or his thoughtlessness; he simply drifted with the clichés of the political movement of his time and so he was unable to *withdraw* from the opinions of the masses and *think* of the consequences of his actions in a more humane way. Arendt thereby inferred, they believe, that the capacity for thought was prerequisite for the exercise of political judgment—something that would contradict her early works about the primacy of action. Commentators believe that this new turn in her thought implied that not action, not 'public space', not commonsense, but the interior, private activity of reflective thought is necessary for freedom. As I suggested earlier, I do not believe that Arendt changed her view about the worth of the political realm and so portions of this dissertation will be devoted to the Eichmann case. I intend to show that Arendt was consistent about her basic claims even in her report about the war criminal.

Careful analysis of Arendt's entire works shows a considerable *consistency* with regard to her critique of the intellectual bias regarding the political. I do not believe that

Arendt changed her mind about her commitment to political action or her celebration of the political realm; I do believe, however, that she developed some of her views without challenging her basic assumptions. Thus far the project of Arendt is negatively put, that is, her critical attitude towards ideological thinking or totalitarian thinking. I believe that there is a positive side for this critical attitude: Arendt's rejection of the prejudice of theory, ideology or philosophy--a prejudice that blocks our access to political phenomena, I suggest, allowed her to introduce some new guidelines for understanding what is truly political. I do not believe that Arendt intended to offer a theory about the meaning of politics or even about thinking about politics; such theory, as I discuss later, has the potential of undermining her whole approach to politics. These guidelines, or guideposts, constitute the foundation of what I call "political thinking" as distinguished from "theoretical thinking". Exploring the nature of these guidelines will become clear as we advance in subsequent chapters.

Providing an account of Arendt's consistency in her thoughts on 'political thinking' will take place through a consideration of several important stages in her life and works. First, I will examine Arendt's early political writings, her dissertation on Rahel Varnhagen and her essays on the critique of Zionism. The work on Rahel might not seem political to some Arendt's scholars; but given her claim that it was written from the vantage point of a Zionist critique of assimilation, this work will at least carry the 'seeds' of her political thought. Her essays on Zionism are also important and I believe that any serious account of Arendt's political thought must face the significance of these writings. Abandoning these writings is equivalent to saying that Arendt started her political thought with *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. Although the importance of the latter work is beyond any doubt, Hannah Arendt did not start her political concerns with this book. Again, neglecting these early writings is almost identical to stating that roughly twenty years of her involvement in Zionist discussions and activities did not influence her political views—which is incomprehensible. In addition, ignoring the significance of her early Jewish works may lead to misunderstandings of her later work, *the Origins of Totalitarianism*, which is directly influenced by her Jewish experiences.

The first stage of this research will consider the central claims about action and thinking in the early works of Arendt, her writings on the Jewish question. Arendt's

*Origins of Totalitarianism* will be touched upon insofar as the effect of totalitarianism on thinking is concerned. I will try to show her fervent critical attitude towards the absolute standards of the philosophers and modern ideologists as well as her emphasis on action and experience as the proper foundations of thinking.

The second stage will be devoted to a number of subjects. First, I will provide an account of an important essay by Arendt directed specifically to the aim of describing both activities of thinking and action. Second, I will provide a textual analysis of Arendt's major work *The Human Condition*. Also in this chapter, I will include a discussion of the controversy of the trial of the Nazi war criminal Adolph Eichmann. This work is relevant to our discussion since it is a dominant view among commentators to believe that it is the place where Arendt changed her mind about the primacy of action and that she was forced to accept the imperatives of thought in politics.

Finally: the above two stages should imply a deep Arendtian commitment to the realm of politics and action rather than a commitment to the realm of absolute standards. This is not to say that Arendt ignored the importance of thinking in the political realm; I believe that Arendt was fully aware that thinking is an essential political activity. However, her concern with thinking, which is a pervasive theme in her entire works, did not lead her to surrender to the absolute standards of 'knowledge' of the 'professional thinkers.' It is in this chapter that we will begin to see a full emergence of her guidelines of political thinking. In this last chapter I will be concerned mostly with her major last essays on thinking which, according to an almost unanimous agreement among commentators became essential parts of her last work, *The Life of the Mind*. This last work will be also touched whenever necessary.

## CHAPTER 1

### FROM PHILOSOPHY TO POLITICS

This chapter will deal with an important stage in Arendt's life and works: her turn to politics and practical matters after years of preoccupation with the classics and German philosophy. This is not to say that she completely lost interest in issues the German philosophy of her day by turning to politics, but rather her turn was something completely foreign to her past philosophical interests. In this chapter, I will discuss three important subjects that appeared in her early writings and contributed significantly to her later views on political thinking as opposed to ideological thinking. First, I will examine the distinction between the Jew as pariah and the Jew as parvenu. Second, I will explore Arendt's attitude towards Zionism. The Arendtian works used for this discussion range from the early dissertation on Rahel to her major work on totalitarianism, i.e., from 1929 to 1951. Third, I will discuss her views on the Palestinian question.

As mentioned earlier, Arendt was concerned primarily with philosophy during her university years. At that time, she studied classics and Christian theology and later when she met and eventually studied under Husserl, and his students Heidegger and Jaspers, she then became interested in general existential subjects. Her first doctoral dissertation, *Der Liebesbegriff bei Augustine*, which was completed in 1929 under the supervision of Karl Jaspers, shows her interests in these existential problems.<sup>1</sup>

Arendt's first doctoral dissertation was published in German in 1929 and printed in Gothic script. The first English translation was done in the early sixties by E. B. Ashton. Arendt intended to revise and publish the work but this attempt was unsuccessful. In fact, Arendt began revising her dissertation by 1964 but she never completed the project and apparently she did not want the translation revised for publication. A copy of this earlier translation is to be found in the Arendt Papers in the Library of Congress. Her work on Augustine, which appeared only recently in English in 1996, shows the influence of Heidegger and Jaspers on her analysis of the concept of Augustinian love, *Caritas*.<sup>2</sup>

Arendt's first doctoral dissertation is a subject of enormous controversy. Editors of Arendt's work argue that key notions of her political philosophy can be found in this

work--such as 'beginning' and 'memory'. They also argue that this book presents an earlier version of Arendt's critique of modernity. I believe that such 'academic' controversy about this work is due to two main factors. First, it is possible to doubt whether this early work is in fact 'early' if Arendt went back in the 1960s and revised it by introducing her later thoughts in preparation for its publication. Arendt's later thoughts are mainly political since she never wrote anything later that is otherwise. In other words, it is the 'late' Arendt who rewrote this early book and therefore it is reasonable that one should not look for the influence of her 1929 dissertation on her later thoughts but to see the influence of her later philosophical-political views on the early work about Augustine. Arendt of the 1960s did nothing to this work but politicizing it. In a review of the 1996 English edited edition, George McKenna offers the same view with regard to the work on Augustine,

It was a very different Hannah Arendt who returned to the dissertation after nearly forty eventful years. The main change she had undergone was political. The Arendt of 1929 had no interest in politics, while the Arendt of the 1960s was nothing if not political<sup>3</sup>

If it is correct to say that the late 'political' Arendt influenced her early dissertation, then, I believe that it is correct to conclude that this task is beyond the scope of this research. The influence of Arendt's later thought on her early dissertation is of a secondary importance given that the main goal of my dissertation is to understand the developments of Arendt's notion of political thinking as well as her critique of ideology and traditional philosophy. I leave it open whether her later thought influenced her rewritten Augustine dissertation or not, what is important is to explore her later thought as it develops through her political transformation.

Second, Arendt's reputation as a philosopher was not established until at least twenty years later, that is, with the publication of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* and her later works. The first dissertation on Augustine was almost completely abandoned even by Arendt herself when she decided not to publish the work in English. Apparently this refusal was due to the later major political shift in her thought which was alien to the spirit with which the dissertation on Augustine was written. It is often tempting to look at Arendt's earlier thought so one might find the foundations of her later political views; however, such a task is always worrisome. The recent approaches to this early text, which

are actually familiar with Arendt's later thought, are apt to exaggerate and overstress many of the claims in the first doctoral dissertation. This is not to say that the recent approaches have gone astray, rather, it is my belief that a natural way of reading Arendt's 'political' development must begin with her first 'clear' touches upon political issues not with her first dissertation which relied heavily on theology and her existential education under Heidegger and Jaspers. It is not my intention to exclude her dissertation on Augustine from her entire corpus; I only believe that the tone and context of this philosophical and abstract dissertation is different from Arendt's later political and practical concerns.

### **The Distinction between the Jew as Pariah and the Jew as a Parvenu**

It is well documented that Arendt attended a lecture about Jewish affairs by Kurt Blumenfeld, who was a leader of the German Zionist movement, during the year that Arendt wrote her first dissertation on Augustine, 1926. After this lecture Blumenfeld became a lifelong friend of Arendt; however, his lecture was not the main reason for her turn to politics or to Jewish politics in particular as we shall see later. Blumenfeld introduced Arendt to the thought of another Zionist spokesperson, Bernard Lazare. Arendt identified with Lazare's version of Zionism, admired him the most and later edited a book collecting his essays. However, she did not change her interest after attending Blumenfeld's lecture especially in the early 1920s because she was still interested in the philosophical problems discussed in Germany at that time, which were influenced in general by Husserl, Heidegger and Jaspers. Reading Lazare was crucial for Arendt's theoretical development since it provided her with a distinction that would dominate most of her thoughts on the Jewish question, the distinction between the Jew as pariah and the Jew as Parvenu.

The distinction between the Jew as pariah and the Jew as parvenu is due to Bernard Lazare. The latter thought of Jews as Pariah people, as isolated from the rest of society and deprived from their human rights. He introduced the concept of 'conscious pariah', a Jew who uses his condition as an outsider to rebel and demand his rights. The

pariah is to be distinguished from the parvenu who seeks nothing but acceptance from society—a society that treats him as second-rate citizen.<sup>4</sup>

Shortly after completing her dissertation on Augustine in 1929, Arendt began to write her second dissertation, on intellectual biography of Rahel Varnhagen. In the late 1920s Arendt received a grant to study German romanticism. In 1929 she began her work on the intellectual biography of Rahel Varnhagen, an assimilated Jew of the late eighteenth century. The book called *Rahel Varnhagen: the Life of a Jewess*, and was not published until 1958. In this book Arendt offers her interpretation of Rahel's life in the light of the distinction between pariah and parvenu. The work traces all the attempts of Rahel at assimilation from baptism until her marriage to gentile, Karl August Varnhagen. The life of Rahel is depicted as an inner struggle caused by a society hostile to Jews. Rahel had to choose between living her life as parvenu or as pariah. Undoubtedly, Rahel's situation was similar to the one Arendt faced in Germany of the 1930s in terms of the rise in anti-Semitism. The Jewish reaction to such anti-Semitism at this period was shockingly similar: most Jews were either parvenus or pariahs.

Arendt describes the situation of Jews in Rahel's days:

Jews in Berlin could grow up like the children of savage tribes. Rahel was one of these. She learned nothing, neither her own history [which began seventeen hundred years ago] nor that of the country in which her family dwelt. The earning of money and the study of the Law—these were the vital concerns of the ghetto...Nineteenth-century Jews mastered the trick of obtaining both wealth and culture.<sup>5</sup>

Jews of Rahel's days did not turn their thinking towards *collective political action* that would ensure their rights. In the face of the rising anti-Semitism, they thought of saving themselves only as *individuals*. It is because of this that Jews did not have a sense of strong solidarity. "The only ties among German Jews of the period seemed to be that questionable solidarity which survives among people who all want the same thing: to save themselves as individuals."<sup>6</sup> Rahel suffered from her unattractive appearance and her agonizing Jewishness. With the rise of anti-Semitism, Rahel's case was no exception to most Jews: she felt a sense of inferiority with regard to the outside world, "therefore she [Rahel] must avoid everything that might give rise to further confirmation [of this inferiority], must not act, not love, not become involved with the world. Given such

absolute renunciation, all that seemed left was *thought*. Objective and impersonal thought was able to minimize the purely human, purely accidental quality of unhappiness.”<sup>7</sup> I will discuss Arendt’s analysis of thought in *Rahel Varnhagen* later when we discuss her critique of theories and ideologies. Now, although she distanced herself from the outside world, there was only few persons who could relate to Rahel’s situation like Heine, the Jewish poet, “She [Rahel] hailed young Heine with enthusiasm and great friendship— ‘only galley slaves know one another’ .”<sup>8</sup>

The work on Rahel explores the meaning and the consequences of the Jewish choice between being a parvenu or pariah. After many years of denying her Jewishness Rahel came to realize that she simply could not do it. She struggled against the fact of her ‘birth’, the fact that she was born Jewish, and this turned out to be a struggle against herself. When Arendt began her book on Rahel, she quoted Rahel’s last few words on her death bed, “the thing which all my life seemed to me the greatest shame, which was the misery and misfortune of my life-having been born a Jewess-this I should on no account now wish to have missed.”<sup>9</sup> Arendt commented on this important turn in Rahel’s life, that Rahel must accept the fact of her birth and return to her status as pariah, by saying “one had to pay for becoming a parvenu by abandoning truth, and this Rahel was not ready to accept.”<sup>10</sup> Arendt’s notion of truth should not carry more weight since she does not imply any ‘philosophical’ or Platonic sense by that term. Moreover, one should not forget the poetical nature of Rahel and Arendt’s writings. Truth in this context means probably *reality* or our admission of a totality of facts which are simply natural such as, our skin color, ethnic origin, or may be our natural inclination to things and some people. Of course, skin color is not as natural as ethnicity for example but this distinction between what is purely natural and what is socially constructed as we know it today is nowhere to be found in Arendt. Abandoning truth is the price that a parvenu pays for his social climbing. To abandon the truth in this sense means that the parvenu must live in a huge lie; that he denies his real self by pretending that he is someone else; and that he wears a mask and conceals his true nature everywhere. Although the parvenu must hide his real self, Arendt believed that “through every hole in his costume his old pariah existence could be detected.”<sup>11</sup> After decades, Rahel came to realize that she cannot escape from what nature has bestowed upon her.

As a Jew Rahel had always stood outside, had been a pariah, and discovered at last, most unwillingly and unhappily, that entrance into society was possible only at the price of lying, of a far more generalized lie than simply hypocrisy. She discovered that it was necessary for the parvenu-but for him alone-to sacrifice every natural impulse, to conceal all truth, to misuse all love, not only suppress all passion, but worse still, to convert it into a means for social climbing.<sup>12</sup>

Becoming a parvenu requires that one should make all the sacrifices that assimilation demands. In most circumstances the assimilationist Jew must practice anti-Semitism itself, “for the person who really wanted to assimilate could not pick and choose among the elements to which she would be willing to assimilate, could not decide what she liked and disliked. If one accepted Christianity, one had to accept the time’s hatred of the Jews right along it.”<sup>13</sup> This was Rahel’s dilemma that eventually awakened her consciousness--she could not live with the paradox of being Jewess and anti-Semitic at the same time.

Those who choose to escape from anti-Semitism by way of being parvenus must not only obscure their identities but also turn against themselves and their people by adopting anti-Semitism “In a society on the whole hostile to the Jews—and that situation obtained in all countries in which Jews lived, down to the twentieth century—it is possible to assimilate only by assimilating to anti-Semitism also.”<sup>14</sup> Arendt has a stronger word for becoming a parvenu or the process of being accepted by society; she calls it ‘fraud’. “It is [fraud] of the greatest value for social successes and for positions in society. By this fraud the pariah prepares society to accept his career as parvenu.”<sup>15</sup> Becoming a parvenu is a matter of challenge: Jews are already alienated from society, because of historical circumstances, and they want to achieve what can never be given to them simply because they were born Jews. The Jewish parvenus reacted to the privileges of birth by demonstrating that they were able to obtain the same privileges by their own powers. The parvenu must strain all his forces, efforts and talents “if he is to climb only a few steps up the social ladder.”<sup>16</sup>

The distinction between the pariah and the parvenu is one of the most important distinctions that preoccupied Arendt’s mind when she shifted her interest from philosophy to politics. She thought about this distinction in *Rahel Varnhagen* as well as other earlier essays on the Jewish question. Some commentators have argued that in *Rahel Varnhagen* one could see Arendt’s first touches upon the meaning of society that

will be central in her later work, *The Human Condition*.<sup>17</sup> But apart from relating her use of the word 'society' in *Rahel* to her later works, it should be noted that the idea of 'society' in *Rahel* is related to the basic distinction between the parvenu and the pariah. The word society meant nothing more than 'high society' or the aristocrats. The parvenu is said to belong to this upper class while the pariah does not. The pariah is outside of society simply because society forces him to stay outside but he accepts this outside status and in fact he defends it since it allows him to affirm his existence. He takes this outside status to be the ground from which he can begin his rebellion against those who deny his existence.

Arendt stated that "the pariah was capable not only of preserving more feeling for the 'true realities', but that in some circumstances he also possessed more reality than the parvenu."<sup>18</sup> Apparently Arendt believes that the pariah's position is closer to reality than that of the parvenu who begins his journey of assimilation by lying and deceiving. What does 'reality' mean in this context? One should note that Arendt does not give us an elaborate answer to this question. However, there are some clear aspects in her different uses of the term. First, there is the usage of the attributes 'more reality' or 'less reality' to describe the *self*. In this sense the pariah is said to have more reality since he is the one who is *aware* of the reality of his status as an outcast and that he takes this status to be his point of departure in his journey of rebelling against the social structure at hand. This awareness allows the pariah also to be known as the 'conscious pariah'. It is that awareness that makes his experience 'meaningful'. The parvenu, on the other hand, lacks this meaningfulness because he begins by denying who he is by using his lies. Thus, the self, which must be Jewish in this context, is said to be 'less real' or 'more real' depending on its awareness of its social status.

It is important to note that 'more reality' or 'less reality' as attributed to the self anticipates her central concept of *The Human Condition*, action, as we shall see this later in more detail. In the latter work she defended the uniqueness of every human being while elucidating her concept of 'action'. Action is characterized as a *beginning* not of something but of *someone* and that corresponds to its ontological foundation, natality or giving birth.

Action as beginning corresponds to the fact of birth...It is the actualization of the human condition of natality...The fact that man is capable of action means that the unexpected can be expected from him, that he is able to perform what is infinitely improbable. And this again is possible only because each man is unique, so that with each birth something uniquely new comes into the world.<sup>19</sup>

In the activity of action there is someone who appears and who discloses *who* he is. Such a disclosure takes place through speech and action. Only in the activity of action a person discloses himself as unique; this genuine disclosure *presupposes* that one faces the fact of his existence as well as his political reality and cannot hide behind any social masks. The pariah who manifests himself 'spontaneously' and in sheer 'innocence' can also 'act' and 'rebel' if his situation required him to do so. The unique identity that is revealed in 'action'-not 'work' or 'labor'- is not obtainable in the case of the parvenu who is 'less real'; who is able to "adjust in principle to everything and everybody."<sup>20</sup> The parvenu is alienated from his 'real' self and so he is entangled by endless lies. When the parvenu discloses himself he does so by affirming his separation from his pariah people—that he is simply someone else.

Secondly, there is also another use for the term 'reality' in Arendt's *Rahel*. This second sense refers to the outer world where reality is attributed to both social existence and nature. Social existence, which is the main goal of the parvenu, is 'less real' while nature contains what Rahel used to call "true realities". Rahel's life is pictured as a dramatic transformation of a woman who was obsessed with 'social status' and later discovered the bankruptcy of such obsession. Rahel discovered, according to Arendt, that "she had been able to purchase a social existence only by sacrificing nature."<sup>21</sup> It is not clear what Arendt meant by nature in this context. However, it is clear that she makes a contrast between first, the social existence of the parvenu, which is based on the amplified lie that Jews are inferior to Christians and second, the 'natural existence' of the pariah who represents himself only as a Jew and thus he is as 'real' as the reality of the untouched nature. Arendt believed that Rahel lost her 'natural existence' but eventually came to embrace it: "she had had to sacrifice the freer life of the pariah and 'green things, children, love, weather'. Certainly 'one is not free when one has to represent something in respectable society, a married woman, an official's wife, etc.'"<sup>22</sup>

Arendt's insight is in fact a simple one: the parvenu is someone who seeks social existence at the price of abandoning his real self and his people. In order for the parvenu to succeed in becoming a member of 'society' he must believe that he is someone else and he might also need to believe that he is born again. The latter belief is impossible "It was not possible to be born a second time."<sup>23</sup> Rahel left Berlin and traveled between so many places in the hope that she would leave her past behind but all these attempts eventually failed "not only because a person cannot easily shed his skin, but because being a Jew was not a problem that pertained specially to Berlin; because there were likewise Jews in Paris, Prague and Karlsruhe who clearly enough reminded others, if not herself, of her true origins."<sup>24</sup> Hence, all the attempts at 'born again' are doomed if they are based on lies. Social existence demands that a Jew must obscure his political reality and the need for a political action that would put an end to the suffering of Jews. From hence, 'society' can never be the place where a Jew can disclose his true self. Under such conditions—that 'society' is restricted to Christians and other people with high status; being a Jew makes someone suspect—it is always better for a Jew to become a conscious pariah, standing outside of society, judging its practices with an objective eye, resisting its practices if the situation required him to. To say that a pariah has 'natural existence' is to say that 'society' is neither his goal nor his place. The pariah belongs to 'nature' where everything 'appears' as it *is*--in its sheer innocence and purity. The pariah represents himself with no masks which are "heavy to carry and obscuring the face"<sup>25</sup>; he represents himself as belonging to nature, confronting the social order, "[gauging] things so consistently by the criterion of what is really and manifestly *natural*."<sup>26</sup> (Italics added)

Karl Jaspers was among the first to read Arendt's book on Rahel. He wrote to Arendt about his impression after reading her work:

This work still seems to me to be your own working through of the basic questions of Jewish existence, and in it you use Rahel's reality as a guide to help you achieve clarity and liberation for yourself.<sup>27</sup>

Jaspers could not help but notice the mood through which the book was written and he tells Arendt that there is an underlying similarity between Rahel and her. Arendt replied by uncovering her intentions:

It [the book] was written from the perspective of a Zionist critique of assimilation, which I had adopted as my own and which I still consider basically justified today.<sup>28</sup>

Arendt also mentioned her general idea about writing *Rahel Varnhagen* in her interview with Gunter Gaus.

The book on Rahel Varnhagen was finished when I left Germany [except for the last two chapters]. The problem of the Jews plays a role in it. I wrote it with the idea, 'I want to understand'. I wasn't discussing my personal problem as a Jew. But now, belonging to Judaism had become my own problem, and my own problem was political. Purely political! I wanted to go into practical work, exclusively and only Jewish work. With this in mind I looked for work in France.<sup>29</sup>

One cannot misread the tone of the whole book on Rahel especially the last two chapters. She wrote these chapters when she was in France working with different Zionist organizations and the Zionist critique of assimilation had a profound impact on her. But even before her Paris years (1933-41), her detachment from intellectuals and academic business was growing. Karl Jaspers wrote to her in 1931 concerning this, "I think an anti-academic mood is-quite understandably-growing stronger in you."<sup>30</sup>

Arendt's distrust of the intellectuals and academic business is due to so many reasons. Some of these reasons are personal. For example, she witnessed the end of her first husband's university career. The reigning faculty group aborted his career because his philosophy of music was not Marxist enough. On the other hand, Martin Heidegger, her friend and teacher, "who took over the rectorship at Freiberg University in the spring of 1933, after his Social Democratic predecessor was dismissed for refusing to post the so-called Jew Notice, delivered a rectoral address celebrating 'the greatness, the nobility of this national awakening'."<sup>31</sup> These reasons partly caused her to doubt academia.

There are also some objective reasons for Arendt's detachment from academic business. Arendt came from a general philosophical background that encouraged introspection. Jaspers for example had his own project of pursuing the 'essence' of the precarious German spirit. Surprisingly enough, Arendt's book on Rahel deals with the subject and shows in some brilliant pages how dangerous 'introspection' can be. We will see her critique of introspection in detail in subsequent chapters. However, it is sufficient for our purposes now to notice that Rahel's dilemma was due in part to introspection. When Rahel could not reach out to the outside world and get in touch with reality she found refuge in nothing but her thoughts. Introspection helped her to keep her distance from the world, action and even love. The other reason that contributed to Arendt's

aloofness from academia is the political events that followed after Hitler's rise to power. Arendt believed that *practical* work must be done in the face of the rising anti-Semitism and so she worked with the Zionists, not because she embraced their ideology but because it was 'pointless to join the assimilationists'.

Arendt's divorce from philosophy and her new interest in politics can be found in her *Rahel Varnhagen*. But there were some specific factors that influenced her turn to politics. For instance, the rising anti-Semitism and the politics of terror that the Nazis practiced made it clear to Arendt that something must be *done*; it is not enough to fabricate ideas about the existing political reality and join the 'alienated' intellectuals. In fact even her readings were changed: according to her biographer, "Arendt began to read Marx and Trotsky and to focus her attention on current affairs."<sup>32</sup> As I mentioned earlier, Arendt's choice was to belong to the Zionists. But one has to be careful when discussing Arendt's version of Zionism since she never subscribed to the official views of Zionism and she justified joining them by stating that "It was now my clear intention to work with an organization. For the first time. To work with the Zionists. They were the only ones who were ready. It would have been pointless to join those who had assimilated."<sup>33</sup>

## **Zionism**

### **I. From Rahel Varnhagen to Zionism:**

Between 1941 and 1951, Arendt's writings mark an important shift in her thinking. The articles she wrote in several German and English newspapers reveal a new focus on politics, current affairs and political theory. Articles that concern this analysis are the ones that were devoted to her critique of Zionism and ideology in general. As we shall see later some of her basic ideas in these articles were already anticipated in the earlier work on Rahel Varnhagen. However, it is important to look again at her critique of Rahel's assimilationist thinking since it shaped her political attitude towards Zionism, the subject matter of the present section.

In Arendt's 'tragic' biography, Rahel was presented as a manifestation of the dilemma and agony for most Jews who had to choose between being pariahs or parvenus. Rahel's life as a person and as a Jewess was bound by a strong sense of inferiority that

society bestowed upon her. Rahel herself admitted that “everything that followed [her infamous birth] was only confirmation, ‘bleeding to death’.”<sup>34</sup> Arendt’s reading of Rahel’s misery is one that deserves a closer attention since it represents her first touches upon the critique of the activity of thinking or introspection.

Therefore, [Rahel] must avoid everything that might give rise to further confirmation, must not act, not love, not become involved with the world. Given such absolute renunciation, all that seemed left was *thought*. The handicaps imposed upon her by nature and society would be neutralized by the mania ‘for examining everything and asking questions with inhuman persistence’. Objective and impersonal thought was able to minimize the purely human, purely accidental quality of unhappiness...Thinking amounted to an enlightened kind of magic which could substitute for, evoke and predict experience, the world people and society. The power of Reason lent posited possibilities a tinge of reality, breathed a kind of illusory life into rational desires, fended off ungraspable actuality and refused to recognize it...Self-thinking brings liberation from objects and their reality, creates a sphere of pure ideas and a world which is accessible to any rational being without benefit of knowledge or experience...Unfortunately, however, [self-thinking] can free isolated individuals only... Although being born a Jewess might seem to Rahel a mere reference to something out of the remote past, and although she may have entirely eradicated the fact from her thinking, it remained a nasty present reality as a prejudice in the minds of others.<sup>35</sup>

In the above quotation as well as in other brilliant pages of *Rahel Varnhagen*, Arendt anticipated some of her later major thoughts about thinking. The personal misery of Rahel, according to Arendt, is due to the fact that she is born Jewish and by way of assimilation she made every attempt to avoid any reminder of this fact. When Rahel Varnhagen discovered that everything around her was a reminder of Jewishness she found refuge in ‘thought’, which worked as an escape-mechanism. She discovered that her unhappiness, which originated from some definite sources, could only be eliminated through objective and impersonal thought; in order for Rahel to avoid her ‘human’ unhappiness she needed only to ‘think’ that she was never a Jewess. To be sure, Rahel fell under the spell of the enlightenment ideas which gave reason the supreme authority, as the highest capacity of man and so she used to repeat phrases such that “everything depends on self-thinking” and that ‘the objects often matter very little, just as the beloved

often matters far less than loving’.”<sup>36</sup> Thus, all Rahel needed to do in order to be happy was to follow the path of the upstarts by removing the fact of her Jewishness from her mind and by believing that anti-Semitism is an illusion, or to be more exact, *irrational*.

The analogy that Rahel made and Arendt was so eager to emphasize between self-thinking or introspection and romantic love is highly significant: introspection frees the thinking ego from all objects of experience as romantic love frees the lover of the reality of his sweetheart. Arendt does not question the mind’s ability to free itself from the prejudices of the past; in fact she admits the mind’s limitless power. However, she believes that such attempts at liberation are doomed because they can free isolated individuals only. Thus, although Rahel can free herself from the prejudices of the past and the present she can never eliminate these prejudices from the minds of others not to mention that her isolated individual thinking is incapable of improving the position of her fellow Jews within society.

Whenever the activity of reason is isolated from the world by making the self the necessary and most important object of its knowledge, i.e., when the activity of reason is transformed into *introspection* and ceases to be interested in the context through which everything appears, the world, reason’s power grows to be unlimited: “In the isolation achieved by introspection thinking becomes limitless because it is no longer molested by anything exterior...Reality can offer nothing new; introspection has already anticipated everything.”<sup>37</sup> All facts can be denied simply because they might not be provable by reason and therefore one can always deny and falsify them. Only truths discovered by reason are irrefutable and proven to anyone. Let us take Rahel’s example: “Jews may not go driving on the Sabbath; Rahel went driving with the actress Marchetti ‘in broad daylight on the Sabbath; nobody saw me [Rahel says]; I would have and would deny it to anyone’s face’.” Arendt comments sarcastically on this example by saying “if she denies it, nothing remains of the fact except one opinion against other opinions.”<sup>38</sup>

The significance of Arendt’s critique of introspection is obviously political. Young-Bruehl in her intellectual biography of Arendt affirms that this critique is a political one.<sup>39</sup> Arendt was concerned primarily with one kind of thinking that Rahel believed to be the way-out of her misery, namely, introspection; but by doing so she implied another kind of thinking although she did not discuss it thoroughly. Introspection

as understood by Arendt goes hand in hand with ‘objective and impersonal thought’. From hence Arendt claims that “Rahel loved no human being [qua human being], but she loved encounters with others *in the realm of truth*. Reason met its counterpart in all people, and these encounters remained ‘pleasurable’ so long as she kept her distance and sold her soul to no one.”<sup>40</sup> (Italic added) Relationships, which reveal more human features of our lives than the sole feature of thinking, were not appreciated in Rahel’s eyes; however, she enjoyed conversations with others as long as these conversations were ‘intellectual’ in nature, and kept at a distance from us as distinct concrete individuals. Impersonal and objective thought became Rahel’s vehicle that drove her from her misery in real life into the comfort of the life of the mind.

At a moment of despair and anguish Rahel said “I wish nothing more ardently now than to change myself, outwardly and inwardly. I...am sick of myself.”<sup>41</sup> Arendt, commenting on this agonizing statement, states that it is always difficult to completely change who you are, to completely change your face or your body and become a different individual simply because you do not live by yourself: “No human being can isolate himself completely; he will always be thrown back upon the world again if he has any *hopes* at all for the things that only the world can give: ‘ordinary things, but things one must have’. In the end the world has the last word.”<sup>42</sup> (Italic added) Rahel’s introspection is futile because of the inability to deny the world: a mental activity such as ‘hoping’ is primarily linked to the world if one is to hope-for-‘something’ no matter how trivial that thing is. Introspection did not rescue Rahel as she had ‘hoped’ it would: although hopes are dependent on the will and thought of somebody who wills a change, the actuality of hopes depends essentially on the world--the touchstone that determines whether these hopes are possible in the first place. Introspection will never lead to any ‘meaningful’ happiness unless it is transformed and comes in touch with reality. This is the lesson that Arendt learned from Rahel and framed her later political writings.

Arendt’s work on Rahel had a profound impact on her thought: Arendt began to doubt the effectiveness of intellectual work and she began to devote her efforts to the Zionist movement “the book on Rahel Varnhagen was finished when I left Germany. The problem of the Jews plays a role in it. I wrote it with the idea ‘I want to understand.’ I wasn’t discussing my personal problems as a Jew. But now, belonging to Judaism had

become my own problem, and my own problem was political. Purely political! I wanted to go into practical work, exclusively and only Jewish work.”<sup>43</sup> With this in mind Arendt joined the Zionists.

## II. Political Views:

It is useful to begin our discussion of Zionism with some historical background. The term ‘Zionism’ was coined by a Jewish writer named Nathan Birnbaum in 1885, as ‘Zion’ is one of the biblical names for Jerusalem. Theodore Herzl, the father of political Zionism, as most encyclopedias state, envisioned the Jewish state in his little book *Der Judenstaat*, or *The Jewish State* published in 1896. Herzl believed that the misery of Jews all over the world was due to their lack of a Jewish state. According to Arendt’s observations, Herzl, as well as Lazare, found their way to Judaism through anti-Semitism. In fact, the same might be said about Arendt herself when she detached herself from all academia and decided to deal with Jewish issues only. Herzl, according to Arendt, seems to accept the ‘eternal’ or the ‘existentialist’ view of anti-Semitism according to which anti-Semitism is taken as a ‘fact’ that determines Jewish identity.

The Jewish question [or anti-Semitism in this context] still exists. It would be foolish to deny it. It is a misplaced piece of medievalism which civilized nations do not even yet seem able to shake off, try as they will...the Jewish question persists wherever Jews live in appreciable numbers. Wherever it does not exist, it is brought in together with Jewish immigrants. We are naturally drawn into those places where we are not persecuted, and our appearance there gives rise to persecution. *This is the case, and will inevitably be so, everywhere, even in highly civilized countries* <sup>44</sup> (Italic added)

In this and other quotations from *Der Judenstaat* Herzl seems to believe in the intrinsic inter-dependent relationship between anti-Semitism and Jewish identity. As we shall see later, this understanding of Jewish identity was criticized by Arendt: the claim that Jewish identity depends somehow on anti-Semitism implies that anti-Semitism is vital for the existence of Jewish identity. It is important to realize that anti-Semitism as understood by Herzl does not lead to confronting anti-Semites but actually becomes a ‘strategy’ for reaching out to them. Herzl, unfortunately, used anti-Semitism and the Jewish people for propaganda purposes and tried to do business with the foes of Jews in order to acquire a land for the Jewish state. Some Jews considered this an obvious disrespect for the genuine Jewish struggle. As I discuss later, this was one of the main reasons for Arendt’s

break from the Zionists. As a recent commentator believe “Arendt was always sharply critical of those [Herzl and his fellow Zionists] who were tempted by the idea that the anti-Semites were the secret allies of the Zionists.”<sup>45</sup> Herzl’s ‘political’ tactics led him to sit at a the same table with those who butchered Jews like Count von Plehve, the organizer of the pogroms, and the most imperial power of the age, Britain. Herzl also negotiated a deal with the Turkish Sultan who was responsible for many genocidal campaigns against the Armenians; Herzl asked the Turkish sultan to give up Palestine for the Jews and the Zionist organization in return would help soften the global condemnation of the massacres.

Herzl organized the first Zionist congress in 1897 in Basel, Switzerland: The Basel congress affirmed that “the aim of Zionism is to create for the Jewish people a home in Palestine secured by public law.”<sup>46</sup> However, Herzl himself when writing his famous book was open to the idea of a Jewish state existing either in Palestine or somewhere else. To be sure, he proposed the creation of this state in Argentina: “Argentina, he wrote, was one of the most fertile countries in the world, sparsely populated and with a temperate climate; it would be in the highest interest of the Republic of Argentina to cede to the Jews a portion of its territory.”<sup>47</sup> Some of the earlier Zionist projects were seriously engaged in discussions about securing a homeland for Jews in “the American Middle West, Arkansas or Oregon; ten millions dollars would be sufficient to induce the American Government to put at the disposal of the Jews an area the size of France”<sup>48</sup> as one of the most sympathetic historians of Zionism states. However, it was Palestine that Herzl and his fellow Zionists finally turned their utmost attention upon: “Palestine...was the unforgettable historic homeland, its very name a rallying cry. If the sultan were to give Palestine to the Jews, they could in return undertake the management of Turkey’s finances and save the sultan from chronic bankruptcy.”<sup>49</sup> The religious faction of the Zionist movement fought hard for Palestine and Herzl, never one to miss the opportunity for symbolism, agreed that the ancient Jewish "homeland" would give the movement more emotive power.

Herzl went through all the details concerning the construction of a country in Palestine. However, he reminded us time and again that he was not creating a utopia and so he could not help but provide some detailed technical account of how this country

would look like, for instance, its constitution, labor exchange, copy right agreements...etc. For our purposes it is important to pay attention to his view about the country's political regime. As the sympathetic historian of Zionism admits,

Herzl preferred a democratic monarchy, or an aristocratic republic. Nations were not yet fit for unlimited democracy, and in this respect Jews were no better than the rest of mankind. The political issues facing the new state would not be of simple kind, to be settled by Ayes and Noes. Politics would have to take shape in the upper strata of the new society and work downwards.<sup>50</sup>

Herzl's remarks cannot be understood outside of the European context during the age of nationalism and imperialism. Herzl was profoundly overwhelmed by the power of kings and princes in his days. After he met the German Kaiser, Herzl wrote in his diaries about this 'great' meeting: "He has truly imperial eyes-I have never seen such eyes. A remarkable, bold, inquisitive soul shown in them."<sup>51</sup> Such an admiration of 'politics conducted from above', which Arendt criticized later, appears clearly in Herzl's view of the masses, 'nations are not yet fit for democracies'.

In a number of articles on the Jewish question written in the 1940s, Arendt developed her critique of Zionism. This is not to say that she completely detached herself from the Zionist movement; rather, Arendt's critique should be viewed as part of her commitment to Zionism even though it contradicted the main and official views of the Zionist movement as expressed in the World Zionist Organization. The value of Arendt's critique is that it provided a new viewpoint which was almost always absent from the literature on the movement. In the following three points, I will try to present the various aspects of Arendt's critique of Zionism, which will help us to understand the development of her concept of the 'political'.

**1. Politics from above and below.** In an article written in 1942 entitled *Herzl and Lazare*, Arendt began by stating the similarities between the two important Jewish thinkers,

Both men were turned into Jews by anti-Semitism. Neither concealed the fact. Both realized just because they were so 'assimilated' that normal life was possible for them only on the condition that emancipation should not remain a dead letter...When they were drawn back Judaism could no longer mean to them a religion...For them their

Jewish origin had a political and national significance. They could find no place for themselves in Jewry unless the Jewish people was a nation.<sup>52</sup>

Arendt makes reference to the importance of the Dreyfus trial. Captain Alfred Dreyfus was a Jewish officer in the French army who was framed and convicted by the French government for treason. This trial had a significant echo in the hearts of most Jews and led many of them to believe that anti-Semitism was inevitable. Herzl, who covered the trial for a Vienna newspaper, heard the rabble cry “death to the Jews” and immediately wrote *The Jewish State*. Lazare who witnessed the trial decided that waiting for a revolution was no longer possible and he fought for Dreyfus’ innocence. The incident led both of them to reexamine their Jewishness but to this point the similarity between them ends. Arendt offered an account of the differences between these two Zionist figures.

With regard to Herzl, Arendt wrote:

Herzl’s solution of the Jewish problem was, in the final analysis, escape or deliverance in a homeland. In the light of the Dreyfus case the whole of the gentile world seemed to him hostile; there were only Jews and antisemites. He considered that he would have to deal with this hostile world and even with avowed antisemites. To him it was a matter of indifference just how hostile a gentile might be; indeed, thought he, the more antisemitic a man was the more he would appreciate the advantages of a Jewish exodus from Europe.<sup>53</sup>

I discussed earlier Herzl's view of anti-Semitism and the symbiotic relation between Jewish identity and anti-Semitism. In fact, Herzl’s strategy to acquire a land for his people led to his acceptance of anti-Semitism; such acceptance was enough to convince Herzl that struggle against anti-Semitism is pointless and thus must be preserved. His conclusion was in accordance with the Zionist belief that “A nation is a group of people...held together by a common enemy.”<sup>54</sup> Herzl wanted to preserve the gentile hatred of Jews in order to succeed in urging the gentile world to support his efforts of securing a land for Jews outside of Europe based on their ‘mutual’ interests. Herzl’s version of Zionism begins to make more sense when the statement that ‘antisemites are the secret allies of Jews’ is taken together with the Zionist acceptance of anti-Semitism. It was a very short jump from this belief to the conclusion that Jews who did not want to leave their countries of birth were considered by the Zionists enemies of the movement.

Lazare’s attitude towards anti-Semitism is different as Arendt states:

To Lazare...the territorial question was secondary- a mere outcome of the primary demand that 'the Jews should be emancipated as a people and in the form of a nation'. What he sought was not an escape from antisemitism but a mobilization of the people against its foes...the consequence of this attitude was that he did not look around for more or less anti-Semitism protectors but for real comrades-in-arms. He knew that antisemitism was neither an isolated nor universal phenomenon and that the shameful complicity of the powers in the East-European pogroms had been symptomatic of something far deeper, namely, the threatened collapse of all moral values under the pressure of imperialist politics.<sup>55</sup>

One of the basic differences between Herzl and Lazare was while the first thought that the supreme goal of the Zionist movement is securing a land in Palestine, the latter thought that the necessary objective was emancipation. Lazare, who fought for proving Dreyfus' innocence when most wealthy Jews were reluctant to support him in fear of the possible growth of anti-Semitism, came to realize that the first lesson that Jews needed to learn was to fight for their rights. To Lazare, winning this fight was partly possible because the whole gentile world is not antisemites--that anti-Semitism is "neither an isolated nor universal phenomenon." Emancipation begins when Jews take action and become aware of their political responsibility and cease to "live on the alms of their wealthy brethren."<sup>56</sup> Like Herzl, Lazare was also critical of the Jewish mentality during this period but he, as Arendt notices, "never despised them [Jews] and did not share Herzl's idea that politics must be conducted from above."<sup>57</sup> Herzl's belief that people are not fit for democracy, "poor, uneducated and irresponsible masses"<sup>58</sup>, became apparent in detaching himself from the rest of Jews and joining the elite in spite of his belief that he is the 'man of the poor'.

Lazare who was by Herzl's side in the executive committee became convinced that the savior-elites had separated themselves from any genuine national struggle and therefore he resigned. He wrote to Herzl that he felt obliged to resign from a committee which "tries to direct the Jewish masses as if they were an ignorant child...That is a conception radically opposed to all my social and political opinions and I can therefore not assume responsibility for it."<sup>59</sup> Lazare was isolated from the rest of Zionists for the rest of his life and as the story goes "everything was set in motion to make him die quietly of hunger."<sup>60</sup>

A full appreciation of Arendt's support of Lazare, who believed that politics must be conducted from below, requires a look at her later works, her attitude towards ideology and her assessment of the tradition—the view that will be made more clear as we advance in the following critiques. However, one can find some clues to understanding her support of Lazare even in her earlier work on Rahel. It seems that Bernard Lazare fits perfectly into her conception of the conscious pariah that she developed in her work on Rahel and we should be reminded that Lazare was one of the main influences on Arendt while writing *Rahel Varnhagen*. In the latter work, we saw that the pariah is forced to stay outside of 'society' by way of antisemitism; we saw also that the pariah accepts this outside status and in fact he defends it since it allows him to affirm his existence. The pariah takes this outside status as the foundation from which he can begin his rebellion against those who would deny his existence. Both Herzl and Lazare accepted anti-Semitism although with some differences in understanding its nature: while the former thought that antisemitism is a natural phenomenon the latter tended to believe that it is a symptom of a severe European disease, a "collapse of all moral values under the pressure of imperialist politics." To their acceptance of anti-Semitism the similarity between them comes to an end. Lazare, the pariah, chose to transform his acceptance of antisemitism into a struggle against the social structure that treated him as an inferior or sub-human in the first place--Arendt believes that this struggle is a mere expression of commonsense since it is natural for one to fight back if acts of injustice were directed against an individual. Lazare's response to anti-Semitism was to restore the Jewish people, "who live on the alms of their wealthy brethren", to their political health by initiating a struggle against the unjust social structure. In other words, if Jews stood up for their political responsibility then they would be emancipated as a nation. Lazare, in general, did not identify a starting point of Jewish politics in the realm of high society nor with the help of imperialist powers but in the Jewish people themselves as a national revolutionary movement. He wanted to confront the immediate enemies of the Jewish people and examine the modern decay of European morality under imperialism. He believed that a meaningful Jewish politics must begin from below, from the emancipated Jewish people with the help of other oppressed minorities in Europe.

Herzl's acceptance of antisemitism as a natural phenomenon and his classification that there are only Jews and antisemites, which Arendt straightforwardly called "plain racist chauvinism"<sup>61</sup>, led to the belief that it is pointless to fight antisemitism individually or collectively. Herzl turned away from the struggle against his *real* enemies and decided to do business with them. In the eyes of pariah, Herzl deprived himself of a meaningful beginning of Jewish politics; Herzl also betrayed the Jewish question when he negotiated deals with those who butchered Jews. Arendt's critique of Herzl is not a trivial one: antisemitism was a daily living experience for those who suffered from its consequences; when Herzl turned this daily suffering into a propaganda for his political agenda he did not only deceive those who suffered but also lost emotional solidarity with them. This being so, it was easy for Herzl to compromise and negotiate with the enemy. Herzl needed no such solidarity; in a sense, Herzl's solidarity can be found with the imperialist powers for they shared the same *imperialist mentality*<sup>62</sup>: "the Jewish question, which was considered the only insoluble one, was indeed solved—namely, by means of a *colonized and then conquered territory*—but this solved neither the problem of minorities nor the stateless. On the contrary...the solution of the Jewish question merely produced a new category of refugees, the Arabs, thereby increasing the number of the stateless and rightless by 700,000 to 800,000 people."<sup>63</sup> (Italic added)

Reading Arendt's support of Lazare in the light of her earlier reflections on the Jewish question highlights her argument. Jewish action can only be represented by the pariah whose struggle against injustices depends on his genuine experience. Such an experience, in which the pariah witnessed an unjust system of values that persecuted Jews, helped the pariah to realize that Jewish emancipation must not lead to further persecutions and injustices. Defending the view that politics must be conducted from below is a continuous line of thought in most of Arendt's writings as we shall see later.

**2. Zionism as an ideology.** The rising tenor of Zionism as an ideology is related to what is said earlier about Herzl who believed that politics must be conducted from above. Herzl's belief does not only mean that the elite should be concerned with the common interest of the people, but also that politics must derive its validity from something beyond the accidental nature of action, namely, the "guide" or "key to history". Herzl's mentality cannot be separated from other 19<sup>th</sup> century political approaches in their

reliance on ideological or nationalistic claims as the ground of explaining, justifying or even predicting reality. I will articulate this second critique as it emerges in Arendt's different essays on the Jewish question.

Western European Zionists according to Arendt "were a fraction of those sons of wealthy Jewish bourgeois families who could afford to see their children through the university."<sup>64</sup> Arendt provides a lengthy analysis of the social background of those intellectuals apparently to show, on one hand, that they were assimilated more than any other class in Jewish life, and on the other, to emphasize the influence of their European education and values on their view of the Jewish homeland. She argues that those intellectual 'created an entirely new class in Jewish life'. The novelty of this class, Arendt believes, is based on the following claims. Those intellectuals held modern liberal professions that have no links whatsoever to the spirituality of the Jewish religion and they had to find themselves through these professions. It was difficult for those intellectuals to find cohesion with their brethren in the face of rising anti-Semitism due to their education and professions; the Jewish classes clung together socially by family and business connections in addition to the strong organization of charity where Jews were either givers or receivers. However, the new intellectuals were not provided for in these social ties: if they were not lawyers or doctors, occupations that would strength their ties to their people, 'they were outside the pale.' Most of those intellectuals were journalists, writers, artists, scientists, teachers and state employees and so they did not need Jewish social connections nor were they needed by other Jews. With regard to the charity organization they were neither givers or receivers. "Thus were the intellectuals excluded from the only practical way in which Western Jewry proved its solidarity with the Jewish people [organization of charity]. The intellectuals did not belong, either socially or politically; there was no place for them in the house of their fathers. To remain a Jew at all they had to build a new house."<sup>65</sup> The new house of the intellectuals was Zionism.

The Jewish intellectuals realized that their people's emancipation must come through the modern national state--a realization that is derived from their culture and 'modern' education in western European nation-states. Thus, Arendt believes, the Zionists "were the only ones who wanted assimilation, namely, "normalization" of the

people (“to be a people like all other peoples”).”<sup>66</sup> In other words, when faced with the dangers of the rising anti-Semitism, Zionists realized that emancipation cannot be achieved by struggle against oppression (Lazare and Eastern European Jewry) nor by ignoring the fact of anti-Semitism (early Rahel) but by becoming ‘modern’, which politically meant asserting the different national character of Jews as a nation. Thus, the Zionist call for a national state was an echo of the new political nationalistic fashion of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

That being said, it was easy for Arendt to conclude that Jewish intellectuals were assimilationist in a sense and that their education and culture led them to think of their homeland in terms of nationalism. There is no doubt that Zionism is one classic kind of nationalism. The basic claim to national statehood is based on the other claim that Jews must recognize the distinctiveness of their national character. In this sense Herzl’s thoughts are undoubtedly nationalistic, “Herzl thought in terms of nationalism inspired from German sources.”<sup>67</sup> However, Arendt points to the fact that it was hard for Herzl to think of the Jewish question outside of the nation-state perspective especially when his book was published in 1896, “In Herzl’s view reality could hardly express itself in any other form than that of the nation-state. In his period, indeed, the claim for national self-determination of peoples was almost self-evident justice as far as the oppressed peoples of Europe were concerned.”<sup>68</sup> If this is the case then Herzl should not be blamed for not anticipating the collapse of the idea of a nation-state which took place almost fifty years after his death. Nevertheless, Arendt argues that the *recent Zionist movement*, not Herzl, should be blamed for asking for a nation-state “when the whole concept of national sovereignty had become a mockery.”<sup>69</sup> Herzl, in Arendt’s view, can be blamed on so many levels but not in that particular one, the problem of ‘bad timing’ as it was called by a recent commentator.<sup>70</sup>

The rise of Zionist *ideology* was made possible by two reasons: first, the emergence of the new class of intellectuals, which was discussed above. Second, the emergence of anti-Semitism as a political force in Russia, Germany, Austria and France in the 80s of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In order to understand how anti-Semitism gave rise to Zionist ideology one needs to remember the historical context of 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe which witnessed the rise of national ideologies as well as nation-states. Nationalism in

general is the belief that was developed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century insisting on the fact that people are bound together by cultural, ethnic or territorial relations. Nationalism in most cases appears in the form of an ideology as a weapon for facing most political uncertainties. Now, if nationalism appears as a form of identity between the state and people of the same background then this identity will inevitably be disrupted by the existence of another nationality that wants to preserve its distinctive national character in the same state; this is what we might call today the problem of minorities in nation-states.

The Zionist reaction, or this fraction of Zionists who are called intellectual or political Zionists, to the clash between two nations under the umbrella of nation-state as well as anti-Semitism appeared in the form of an *ideology*, “The Zionists...fled the field of actual conflict into a doctrine of eternal anti-Semitism governing the relations between Jews and Gentiles everywhere and always, and mainly responsible for the survival of the Jewish people.”<sup>71</sup> Arendt suggests that Herzl’s ideology begins with his notion of reality as an eternal phenomenon, or more precisely, with his notion of anti-Semitism as an eternal unchanging hostile structure where the whole gentile world is explicitly or implicitly anti-Semitic. She believes that it was this emphasis on the eternal nature of reality that led to all of Herzl’s misconceptions.

Herzl’s will to reality at any price rested on a view that held reality to be an unchanging and unchangeable structure, always identical with itself. In this reality he saw little else but eternally established nation-states arrayed compactly against the Jews on one side, and on the other side the Jews themselves, in dispersion and eternally persecuted.

Nothing else mattered: differences in class structure, differences between political parties or movements, between various countries or various periods of history did not exist for Herzl. All that did exist were unchanging bodies of people viewed as biological organisms mysteriously endowed with eternal life; these bodies breathed an unchanging hostility towards the Jews that was ready to take the form of pogroms or persecution at any moment. Any segment of reality that could not be defined by anti-Semitism was not taken into account and any group that could not be definitely classed as anti-Semitic was not taken seriously as a political force.<sup>72</sup>

Herzl’s understanding of anti-Semitism makes it a universal, natural reaction of all people against the very existence of Jews anywhere in the world. Such universal approach, Arendt believes, is simply absurd and a plain distortion of reality--if the whole

world is actually against Jews then they are lost, “If we actually are faced with open or concealed enemies on every side, if the whole world is ultimately against us, then we are lost.”<sup>73</sup>

The rising tenor of Zionism as an ideology appears more clearly in its claim for a state or homeland in Palestine but we will save this discussion for the next critique. For our present purposes it is important to realize that the increasing ideological tone of Zionism goes hand in hand with its detachment from commonsense and reality. Action, at least at this elementary stage of Arendt’s thought, implies an immediate confrontation with the world from which our thoughts must spring; action means that one becomes familiar with reality with all its accidental and overwhelming odds. From this perspective, action can be contrasted with ideology, which is the attempt to escape or ‘reinterpret’ reality in order to achieve other interests. The *universal* approach with which Herzl viewed anti-Semitism seemed unable to fit reality, since it is false to assume that all countries are anti-Semitic. Moreover, Herzl’s approach made it hard from the very beginning to think about action concerning anti-Semitism. The picture that Herzl’s drew of reality- that Jews must be transferred to Palestine if they are to save themselves from an eternal anti-Semitism- is terribly nightmarish and this was due to his ‘outside’ ideological thinking. Herzl’s outside view of reality and his universal notion of eternal anti-Semitism “made it impossible from the very beginning for the Zionists to seek truly loyal allies [since the whole world is anti-Semitic].”<sup>74</sup> In fact, Herzl and most Zionists believed that the creation of Israel in the Arab Palestine is the solution or the answer to anti-Semitism but as a recent Israeli scholar notes, “We know that Zionism in Palestine/Israel could not and *did not* solve the problem of anti-Semitism...Zionism only helped the center of anti-Semitism to shift from Europe to the Middle East” but the scholar did not fail to assert that “Arab anti-Semitism [was] nearly nonexistent before Zionist migration to Palestine.”<sup>75</sup> In fact, the so-called ‘golden age’ of Jewish people in history took place under the tolerant Islamic-Arab rule according to most Jewish encyclopedias.

Central to Arendt’s belief in the ideological character of Zionism is the frenzied unanimity of opinions concerning the question of Palestine. In order to understand Arendt’s criticism of this unanimity or conformity one has to recall what she meant by

politics—the task she embarked on later in her life. Arendt makes a basic distinction between opinion and ‘truth’. I will deal with this distinction in detail in the second chapter when I discuss her views on the traditions; however, it is sufficient for our present purposes to notice that she derives the meaning of politics from human affairs where people who live together spontaneously disclose who they are in the form of opinions carried out through dialogue. Opinions are probable and different for they depend on the disclosure of the uniqueness of ‘who’ the agent is in relation to the world. To submit an opinion among different opinions also presuppose the fact that we are equal and so no one can claim to have absolute knowledge over another—this is based on the belief that we are humans and can be wrong sometimes. Any opinion that claims its absolute validity, resistant to all challenges and critiques by other fellowmen, becomes ‘truth’—a realm where dialogue loses its effectiveness. From hence, genuine politics goes hand in hand with the paradoxical ‘*plurality*’, the fact we are the same, we are humans, but also different since we have diverse views with regard to the world. The introduction of absolute knowledge or truth into the realm of politics is the most dangerous activity since it tends to suppress other opinions and eliminate human spontaneity; such ‘truth’ expresses itself in many forms, for instance, an ideology or any interpretation of history. Arendt’s emphasis is on the clash between different opinions that gives rise to ‘more truthful opinions’ and thus excluding all ‘godlike certainty’. In her article “*Philosophy and Politics*”, which will be included in our later discussions, Arendt shows her reservation about the claims of most philosophers who believe that good politics is the one derived from the standards of contemplation. However, Arendt notices that differences of opinion are not only threatened by the introduction of ‘truth’ to the realm of politics, but also by some *historical* circumstances: different opinions or the unique disclosure of the ‘who’ can be in danger “whenever human togetherness is lost, that is, when people are for or against other people.”<sup>76</sup> The significance of this latter insight is of supreme importance with regard to the unanimity of Jewish opinions concerning Palestine.

In the year 1947 the UN passed its resolution for partition of Palestine and in 1948 the Jewish state was established. In 1948 Hannah Arendt witnessed a tragic development in Jewish public opinion: all Jews supported partition. Zionism won its most

significant victories during the year 1948 at a time of vicious guerilla warfare between Jews and Arabs. Zionists or the Jewish agency “though claiming to speak for the Jewish people as a whole, was still well aware that it represented only a fraction of them. This situation has changed overnight... There is no individual Jew that does not privately or publicly support the partition and the establishment of the state of Israel.”<sup>77</sup> The growing unanimity has an unambiguous mood, “The general mood of the country, moreover, has been such that terrorism and the growth of totalitarian methods are silently tolerated and secretly applauded.”<sup>78</sup> Jews came to believe that “the moment has now come to get everything or nothing, victory or death; Arab and Jewish claims are irreconcilable and only a military decision can settle the issue; the Arabs-all Arabs- are our enemies and we accept this fact.”<sup>79</sup> In an attempt to find the source of this unanimous public opinion concerning violence as the proper means of politics, Arendt claims “It would be frivolous to deny the intimate connection between this mood on the part of Jews everywhere and the recent European catastrophe [the holocaust], with the subsequent fantastic injustice and callousness toward the surviving remnant that were thereby ruthlessly transformed into displaced persons. The result has been an amazing and rapid change in what we call national character”<sup>80</sup> and thus the Arabs paid the price for someone else’s crime.

The transformation of different and often contradictory views into unanimity of opinion could be due to the introduction of truth into the realm of politics or the influence of concrete historical experiences or both. The experience of Jewish homelessness and radical anti-Semitism in Europe made it clear for Jews that something must be done—that they must become ‘real’ by having a place in reality. Therefore, “Jewish people have suddenly ceased to believe in survival as an ultimate good in itself... Now Jews believe in fighting at any price and feel that ‘going down’ is a sensible method of politics.”<sup>81</sup> Thus, all differences of opinion had disappeared from Jewish politics allowing the rise of one supreme ‘truth’ or ideology: “The tragedy of Jewish politics at this moment is that it is wholly determined by the Jewish Agency and that no opposition to it of any significance exists either in Palestine or America.”<sup>82</sup> Reflecting on this new radical change in Jewish public opinion, Arendt says:

Unanimity of opinion is a very ominous phenomenon, and one characteristic of our modern mass age. It destroys social and personal life, which is based on the fact that we

are different by nature and by conviction. To hold different opinions and to be aware that other people think differently on the same issue shields us from that godlike certainty which stops all discussion and reduces social relationships to those of an ant heap. A unanimous public opinion tends to eliminate bodily those who differ, for mass unanimity is not the result of an agreement, but an expression of fanaticism and hysteria. In contrast to agreement, unanimity does not stop at certain well defined objects, but spreads like an infection into every related issue.<sup>83</sup>

Arendt was disturbed by this new phenomenon which caused a strong sense of conformity to one ideology by the Jewish people. Such conformity does not only lead to eliminating any opposition but also to a tragic undermining of the 'political'. The latter, which is supposed to be the realm where different opinions are freely discussed and challenged, is almost eradicated by the rise of this new unanimity. Arendt suggests that the rise of this new phenomenon is a characteristic of our modern age; in her later works, as we shall see, this conformity will be the push for her to create the distinction between the 'social' and the 'political'. However, with regard to the Palestinian question, Arendt characterizes this unanimity as an expression of fanaticism and hysteria and she contrasts it with the notion of 'agreement'. Arendt's later reflections on the 'political' might clarify her present distinction between agreement and fanaticism.<sup>84</sup> An agreement is a process limited by definition to some specific object or objects: in order for us to agree we must agree *on* a well-defined 'something'. Subjectively, an agreement involves both thought and speech normally through the activity of 'persuasion', which takes place between people who are equal. Thus, for someone to agree means that he submits his opinion concerning the object insofar as it opens up for him; an opinion expresses its relation to the world in the form of phrases such as 'it appears to me' or 'it seems to me'. Arendt's point is that an opinion is neither subjective fantasy nor absolute and valid for all: it is not merely subjective because it depends on an object appearing in the world and it is not absolute since one might see something while the others do not. Fanaticism or hysteria is a radical form of agreement; it is a sweeping submission to one *truth* and all its consequences in the absence of all attempts 'to stop and think'. Since 'truth' cannot be probable, people who hold it tend to be hostile toward other opinions and they even refuse to discuss it; the mere fact that truth is being discussed and criticized by other people undermines its truth. From hence, truth-holding people tend not to persuade or

convince others of their 'truth', in fact, they are left with one sole option if they want to communicate their ideas: coercion. Fanatics are hopeless, not because they think their ideas are worthy of devotion, but because they believe these ideas are worthy of absolute devotion against every other opinion. Fanaticism destroys human togetherness in its attempt to eliminate all possible disagreements, which is one natural way of disclosing 'who' we are.

By 1948, facing this extreme unanimity of opinion among Jewish people in the absence of all opposition, Arendt found herself a pariah not among the gentiles but among her own people and her story was similar to that of Lazare. With regard to Zionism, it was not anymore an option to agree or to disagree with it; Zionism was accepted unequivocally and unanimously. The Jewish agency had no opposition whatsoever and the non-Zionist opposition, by the time Arendt wrote her work, simply 'no longer exists.'

### **The Palestinian Question**

Arendt's critique of the Zionist movement with regard to Palestine can be divided into two main claims: First, the Zionists ignored the objective reality of the region, the Arabs, and failed to begin a genuine cooperation with them. Second, the Zionists aimed at establishing a sovereign Jewish state not just a Jewish homeland.

There are two 'stories' in the history of the middle-east conflict that might be of some help as an introduction to Arendt's thought about Palestine. The first story is the one about the two rabbis who visited Palestine. Herzl's *The Jewish State* was a subject of infinite debates among many people in Jewish communities. The rabbis of Vienna decided to see whether Herzl's ideas were practical and so they sent two of their own to examine 'closely' the situation in Palestine. The two rabbis later cabled their headquarters from Palestine saying "the bride is beautiful, but she is married to another man."<sup>85</sup> The second story is told by the Oxford scholar, Avi Shlaim. Shlaim opens his book *The Iron Wall* quoting an article written by a Russian born teacher, Yitzhak Epstein, in 1907 entitled "A Hidden Question": "Among the grave questions raised by the concept of our people renaissance on its own soil...there is a question that is more weighty than

all the others put together. This is the question of our relations with the Arabs.” This question, he added, “has not been forgotten, but rather has remained completely hidden from the Zionists, and in its true form has found almost no mention in the literature of our movement.” Shlaim, commenting on Epstein’s anxiety, states, “the hidden question came back to haunt the Zionist movement and the state of Israel throughout the first fifty years of its existence.”<sup>86</sup> Along similar lines, Hannah Arendt was also aware of the fact that the Palestinians were almost always absent from all Zionist discussions and debates. In her most important article on the Jewish question, *Zionism Reconsidered*, Arendt refers to the Biltmore Program (1942) in which the World Zionist Organization (WZO), against all commonsensical beliefs, “had granted minority rights to the Arab majority”; she also refers to the WZO convention held in Atlantic City (1944) which “adopted unanimously...the demand for a free and democratic Jewish commonwealth [state]...which shall embrace the whole of Palestine, undivided and undiminished.” Concerning this convention Arendt stated one general fact “This time the Arabs were simply not mentioned in the resolution, which obviously leaves them the choice between voluntary emigration or second class citizenship.”<sup>87</sup> Arendt believed that this new turn in Jewish politics was completely identical with the demands of the ‘revisionists’ or the national extremists, who “were the first to advocate the transfer of all of Palestine Arabs to Iraq.”<sup>88</sup>

Arendt believed that one of the fatal mistakes of the Zionist ideology is the fact that it began by ignoring the reality of Arab existence in the region. The Zionist movement since the Balfour declaration and under the leadership of Chaim Weizmann expressed itself in a slogan, which was created to stir up the support for Zionism, “A land without a people for a people without a land”—this slogan was repeatedly criticized by Arendt. Arendt believed that ignoring the Arabs was a symptom of a deeper problem inherent in the Zionist movement, namely, its *national ideological character* where ideology for Arendt is more or less a distorted picture of reality:

Ideological explanations are those which do not fit realities but serve some other ulterior interests or motives. This does not mean that ideologies are ineffective in politics; on the contrary, their very momentum and the fanaticism they inspire frequently overwhelm more realistic considerations. In this sense, almost from the beginning, the misfortune of

the building of a Jewish National Home has been that it was accompanied by a central European ideology of nationalism and tribal thinking among the Jews.<sup>89</sup>

Thus, the problem of the Zionist movement can be found in its departure from actual historical facts in order to achieve other purposes, the creation of a national Jewish state. If the Zionists decided to look the other direction and *think from below* then they would have to admit the Arab existence and begin, at least tentatively, some kind of cooperation with them. However, it is a fact that “Zionist ideology...started not from a consideration of the realities in Palestine but from the problem of Jewish homelessness. The thought that ‘the people without a country needed a country without a people’ so occupied the minds of the Zionists leaders that they simply overlooked the native population.”<sup>90</sup>

Palestine was ideologically pictured as an empty land with no people worth mentioning, no history no culture and above all no politics; an entire ancient history of people, living in more than 1000 villages with abundant citrus and olive groves, was simply neglected in order for an ideology to fit reality: “for ideological reasons, the Jews overlooked the Arabs, who lived in what would have been an empty country, to fit their preconceived ideas of national emancipation.”<sup>91</sup>

The Zionist failure to recognize the existence of Arabs and to build good relations and agreements with them may not only be taken as an expression of its national ideological character but also a result of other ‘worthwhile’ agreements made between the Zionists and foreign powers, “Nationalism is bad enough when it trusts in nothing but the rude force of the nation. A nationalism that necessarily and admittedly depends upon the force of a foreign nation is certainly worse.”<sup>92</sup> The dependence of Zionism on foreign powers and their continuing avoidance of the Arab population, Arendt believes, would help reinforce the anti-Semitic image of Jews as profiteers from the presence of foreign powers.

Arendt repeatedly warned us against the rising national tendency of Zionism which would inevitably make the presence of non-Jews in the national Jewish state simply miserable. She knew quite well that the Arabs, Christians or Moslems, under such conditions would either migrate to other countries or become second-class citizens. It seems that Arendt foresaw today’s reality as expressed in the words of a recent Israeli scholar, Raz-Krakotzkin:

The establishment of the state of Israel as a Jewish state caused the destruction of the Arab entity and the expulsion and escape of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians. It then led to the confiscation of most Arab land, which was henceforth declared to be Jewish national property. The definition of Israel as a Jewish state turned its Arab citizens, those who were not expelled from its territory in 1948, into second-class citizens.<sup>93</sup>

The Israeli scholar admits the truth in Arendt's predictions with regard to the Palestinian tragedy as a result of the establishment of the national Jewish state. It should be noted that this Arendtian view challenges the "commonly accepted versions of the events, according to which the Palestinians are to be blamed for their tragedy because of their refusal to accept the partition plan. Arendt predicted the evacuation as the result of the UN resolution, not its rejection."<sup>94</sup> Part of the story about Arab evacuation as seen by Arendt is the massacres committed by Jewish terrorists against Arabs; Arab evacuation would not have taken place so fast "had not the massacre of Deir Yassin [1948] struck fear of the Jews into the Arab population."<sup>95</sup> From Arendt's point of view, the evacuation of Palestinians that resulted in the refugee problem was not the outcome of their refusal to accept the UN partition plan but because of its execution by force. Thus, the radical 'revisionist' program, which was adopted in the Atlantic City convention by the World Zionist Organization (1944) and demanded "a free and democratic Jewish commonwealth ... which shall embrace the whole of Palestine, undivided and undiminished", proved successful. The Arabs were simply not mentioned in the resolution and in concrete reality most of them were forced to leave their country and their land was enveloped into Israeli territory. Those who stayed, as Arendt predicted, were turned into second-class citizens.

It is sad that some recent 'experts' on Arendt believe that they can bring the force of her argument without looking critically at the historical background. Commenting on Arendt's prediction that a Jewish national state would lead to an Arab refugee problem or turning them into second-class citizens, Richard J. Bernstein states: "The revisionists refused to acknowledge that they wanted to do to the Palestinian Arabs precisely what the European nation-states had done to them—to make the Arabs into second-class citizens or better, to exclude them altogether from the new state."<sup>96</sup> Bernstein does not advance a single justification for his claim nor does he attempt to do so, because his claim is simply unjustifiable. Bernstein's claim is unjustifiable if one takes into account the historical events on one hand and the official discourse of the Israeli government on the other. First,

with regard to the expulsion of Palestinians, contrary to Bernstein's belief, it was not only the revisionists program but also an official 'open' policy of the Israeli government. Moshe Dayan, former Israeli chief of staff and minister of defense, in his address before students at the Israel Institute of Technology admits to removing any trace of the Arabs from the map of Israel:

We came to a country that was populated by Arabs, and we are building here a Hebrew, Jewish state. Instead of Arab villages, Jewish villages were established. You do not even know the names of these villages and I do not blame you, because these geography books no longer exist. Not only the books, but also the villages do not exist...Nahalal was established in place of mahalul, Gevat in place of Jibta, Sarid in the place of Hanifas and Kafr Yehoushu'a in the place of Tel Shamam. There is not a single settlement that was not established in the place of a former Arab village.<sup>97</sup>

The revisionists, whom Bernstein defends by claiming that they 'refused' to acknowledge their intention of expelling the Palestinians or turning them into second-class citizens, *do not* refuse to acknowledge such intentions. In fact, the founder of the revisionist movement Vladimir Jabotinsky does not hesitate to uncover his belief that colonization is his ultimate aim in Palestine against the will of the natives:

Colonization has its own integral and inescapable meaning understood by every Jew and by every Arab...It has been necessary to carry on colonization against the will of the Palestinian Arabs and the same condition exists now...We cannot give any compensation for Palestine, neither to the Palestinians nor to the Arabs...All colonization, even the most restricted, must continue in defiance of the will of the native population. Therefore, it can continue and develop only under the shield of force which comprises an *Iron Wall* through which the local population can never break through. This is our Arab policy. To formulate it any other way would be hypocrisy.<sup>98</sup>

Second, with regard to those Palestinians who did not leave their country, as Arendt predicted and Bernstein refused to admit, second-class citizenship was inevitable. As Israel Shahak points out in a significant study, "the State of Israel officially discriminates in favour of Jews and against non-Jews in many domains of life, of which I regard three as being most important: residency rights, the right to work and the right to equality before the law."<sup>99</sup>

Arendt's alternative to the national Jewish state was a bi-national solution that would insure a Jewish national homeland within a bi-national state. Arendt in this regard was associated with a small Jewish group called *Brit Shalom* (covenant of peace), which demanded a Jewish homeland through negotiations with Arab leaders—a group that had few supporters. It is reasonable to understand Arendt's support of a Jewish homeland within a bi-national state as being derived from her critique of nationalism and ideology. Zionism, as Arendt saw it, conceived of reality through the eyes of national ideology as well as European colonial mentality—a conception that led to a cruel exclusion of “the only permanent reality in the whole constellation [which] was the presence of Arabs in Palestine.”<sup>100</sup> The alternative to this national colonial view is to provide a new perspective—within the general Zionist goal of saving the Jewish people-- that would challenge colonial discourse and view reality, as Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin calls it, “from the standpoint of the victim”. Seen thus, “Zionism should manifest the responsibility of the victim to the conditions that enabled their exclusion and extermination.”<sup>101</sup>

Arendt suggested that the United Nations should interfere by first, proposing trusteeship over Palestine and, second, initiating direct constructive talks between sincere Arabs and Jews who believe in Jewish-Arab cooperation. These parties would at least negotiate a truce. Arendt believed that such talks “would show the Jews and the Arabs that it could be done.”<sup>102</sup> Partition must not enter the picture since “The partition of so small a country could at best mean the petrification of the conflict, which would result in arrested development for both people.”<sup>103</sup> Negotiations between Arabs and Jews must lead to the alternative of a federated state which is based on Jewish-Arab community councils, the concept that will dominate explicitly or implicitly her most philosophical works: “A federated structure... would have to rest on Jewish-Arab community councils, which would mean that the Jewish-Arab conflict would be resolved on the lowest and most promising level of proximity and neighborliness.”<sup>104</sup> That the Jewish-Arab conflict should be solved on the lowest level is the most realistic option according to Arendt. Any solution to the conflict must begin with an admission of the other as an essential and equal part of any future building of Palestine. Arendt repeatedly stressed the fact that “the Palestinian Arabs should be guaranteed a well-defined share in the Jewish development

of the country, which under any circumstances will still continue to be their common homeland.”<sup>105</sup>

However, it seems that history took another radical direction against Arendt’s wishes. The UN resolution of partition meant for Israelis a declaration of independence while the other country implied in the partition resolution was simply ignored. As Raz-Krakotzkin points out “The principle of partition was removed from the Israeli Declaration of Independence, where the UN resolution is described as the international recognition of the Jewish state. The Palestinian state was forgotten and denied.”<sup>106</sup> All of Arendt’s hopes that Jews and Arabs would negotiate and make agreements or compromises for peace were unfortunately doomed. Her hopes that different people would set an example to the world by showing that there is no difference that cannot be bridged also came to ruin. In the terms of her later philosophical works, human togetherness of Arabs and Jews was lost because of their turn against each other. Arendt, like many of those who devoted themselves to ‘view reality from the standpoint of the victim’, eventually turned her attention away from the Jewish question and never discussed it again. This is not to say that she questioned the principles with which she viewed and analyzed the whole conflict, such as her defense of the pariah form of existence, her rejection of the national and ideological distortion of reality, the openness of objective realities to a variety of eyes and views and that thought must begin from experience. As we shall see later, these themes constitute the cornerstone of her later philosophical thought and her views on the traditions, which will be included in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 2

### A CLOSER LOOK AT 'POLITICAL THINKING':

In the first chapter I discussed Arendt's initial approaches to the problem of thinking as it emerged from her discussion of the Jewish question. In *Rahel Varnhagen The Life of a Jewish Woman*, thinking was one of Rahel's ways, if not the most important one, that helped her to avoid the misery of being born Jewish in an anti-Semitic world. Thinking was an escape-mechanism from the problems caused by reality: while *reality* informed Rahel that anti-Semitism is inevitable, she embraced the *belief* that anti-Semitism is irrational and so she concluded that anti-Semitism is simply an illusion. Rahel came to believe, thanks to the activity of thinking, that every truth can be falsified and that every reality can also be denied therefore she was able to avoid confronting her own existence. It was only later that Rahel discovered she could never avoid the facts of her existence, in particular, that her Jewishness was an essential part of her appearance in the world. In light of Arendt's later writings on the Jewish question and her distinction between the parvenu and the pariah, Arendt continued her critique against any kind of thinking that involves an escape from reality, from responsibility towards the world and our fellowmen. This line of criticism was evident in her critique of Herzl and his idea concerning the eternal antagonism between Jews and non-Jews and his hope of establishing a Jewish state while disregarding the native inhabitants. Also related to this subject is Arendt's critique of ideologies in general which, she believes, provide an inaccurate picture of reality in most cases. She believed that the problem with most ideologies lies in the fact that they derive the validity of politics from a sphere beyond the accidental nature of action, namely, the mind and its ability to provide 'keys' or 'guides to history.' Arendt was convinced that any departure from the sphere of action was a clear detachment from commonsense and reality and this was the fate of ideologies.

Arendt's interest in the activity of thinking, as we shall see later, is not something that is seen only in her late writings, precisely after her work on Eichmann, as some commentators believe. In her article, 'Philosophy and Politics', delivered in 1954 at the University of Notre Dame (unpublished until 1990), Arendt expressed her interest in the

activity of thinking in relation to politics.<sup>1</sup> This article, I believe, is of central importance to understanding Arendt since most of her themes about thinking are repeated in her later writings. However, at this stage of Arendt's thought, her focus was shifted from Jewish politics to political theory. Facing the rise of ideologies and their apparent detachment from reality-Arendt's continuous concern- she decided to analyze the initial divorce of the activity of thinking or 'philosophy' from action or politics. In the following, we will see that she traces this split to Greek origins: the trial and death of Socrates.

### **Philosophy and Politics**

Before discussing in detail the original disjuncture of the activity of thinking from acting, it is important to address a common difficulty with regard to Arendt's consideration of the Greek experience. The difficulty is this: Arendt's thought was almost generally accepted as a celebration of the *polis* way of life; this *polis*, according to some commentators, is supposed to take the status of a paradigm by which modern political experiences are judged. This thesis is usually referred to as Arendt's Graecomania. I believe that this thesis is unfounded. Hannah Arendt, like so many other philosophers, tried to express her philosophical arguments through her reading of past philosophers and experiences. The problem that she tries to answer, however, is a modern one-- one that political theory faces today: the prejudice of theory in regard to practice or the bias of the activity of thinking concerning politics or action. Arendt's use of the Greek experience is one way of expressing her thoughts: meaning that she did not intend to endorse the Greek experience in all its aspects. There is no doubt that the Greek *polis* offered Arendt great political insights but this does not imply any commitment to the Greek understanding of politics as a whole. In the following review of the 1954 article, I will offer more reasons for rejecting the Graecomania thesis: in the final analysis we will see that Arendt never endorsed the *polis* way of life simply because she offered her own critique of it.

The opening of 'Philosophy and Politics' shows clearly that "the gulf between philosophy and politics [or thinking and acting] opened historically with the trial and condemnation of Socrates."<sup>2</sup> The trial of Socrates had profound effects on Plato, with whom the traditions of political western thought began. This effect on Plato took several

directions, which will be discussed in this review: 1. His doubts concerning some fundamentals of Socrates' teachings 2. The hopelessness that Plato felt during the trial with regard to the *polis* 3. Plato's rejection of both *doxa* and *phronesis*. In what follows we shall discuss these points in detail.

The 'fable' of Socrates and Plato's reaction, as told by Arendt, begins with Socrates' trial. Socrates in the trial was unable to *persuade* the judges of his innocence and his merits. Socrates' position in his defense was to emphasize that his behavior was in the best interest of society, but as we all know Socrates failed to persuade the judges. In fact, in addition to the judges, Socrates seemed also unable to persuade his friends of the 'form' of his defense: in the *Crito*, when Socrates told his friends that he could not flee but must, for political reasons, suffer the death penalty; it looked as though he was unable also to convince them of the validity of this argument on a political level. Arendt suggested that Socrates was torn between two options which made it hard, although not impossible, to convince his friends of his defense, not of course his innocence which they knew well: first, whether a philosopher is really needed for the city, and second, whether his friends really need political argumentation to be persuaded. Arendt stated in *Between Past and Future*, that the only way that was appropriate for Socrates to convince his friends was an altogether different form of persuasion, namely, setting an example: "Socrates decided to stake his life on this truth—to set an example, not when he appeared before the Athenian tribunal but when he refused to escape the death sentence. And this teaching by example is, indeed, the only form of 'persuasion' that philosophical truth is capable of without perversion or distortion."<sup>3</sup> Plato, witnessing Socrates' inability to persuade his judges and friends, began to doubt the efficiency of persuasion. Plato decided to write his own 'apology' which was supposed to be "more persuasive", namely, the *Phaedo*: the dialogue, while offering many arguments for immortality, ends with a myth of the hereafter and bodily punishments and rewards which would frighten rather than convince.

"Closely connected with his doubt about the validity of persuasion is Plato's furious denunciation of *doxa*."<sup>4</sup> *Doxa* or opinion was understood by Plato as the opposite of truth. "The spectacle of Socrates submitting his own *doxa* to the irresponsible opinions of the Athenians, and being outvoted by a majority, made Plato despise opinions and

yearn for absolute standards.”<sup>5</sup> At this point, Arendt finds the first impulse of Plato’s political theory, the theory of the forms. This theory relies on truth as providing some source of reliability in the world of human affairs, “where without such transcending standards, everything remains relative.”<sup>6</sup> The lesson that Plato learned from the trial was that the city of *doxa* is no safe place for philosophers. The *polis* had a prejudice toward philosophers: the city did not only condemn them, it was even more probable that it would never remember them again and so philosophers could lose their worldly immortality. This might explain why Plato turned against the city of *doxa* altogether: in his political philosophy he shows us that the philosopher is concerned with eternal things and that this eternal concern does not prevent him from being the proper ruler in political matters. The notion of ‘the good’ which plays a decisive role in Platonic theory of forms has also its political significance: “the good can be applied and has an element of use in itself. Only if the realm of ideas is illuminated by the idea of the good could Plato use the ideas for political purposes and, in the *Laws*, erect his ideocracy, in which eternal ideas were translated into human laws.”<sup>7</sup>

Since *doxa* could not enable Socrates to persuade the judges, because he never claimed to be wise, Plato believed that only truth, derived from transcendent sources, is worth defending. The problem with truth, however, is that as soon as it is brought down to the city it becomes an opinion among other opinions; people will talk about it and it is probable that they will also criticize it. In other words, when the eternal comes to the city a fundamental change is introduced to its nature, the eternal becomes temporal and so the very discussion of it would threaten its honored character. Plato’s reaction to the trial took notice of the inherent relation between *doxa* and speech (Arendt points out to the identification of speech and thought in *logos*). Therefore, when Plato arrived at his absolute standards he developed a specific philosophical form of speech, *dialegesthai*, which is supposed to be the way for knowing the forms and considered the opposite of persuasion and rhetoric. One should note that Socrates, although the first to use this method, never made a distinction between dialectic and persuasion and never considered the result of dialectic to be other than *doxa*. Thus, Plato was able to avoid any threat posed to truth from public *doxai*. Arendt notices that the opposition of truth and opinion

is the most anti-Socratic conclusion that Plato drew from the trial; she offers her explanation for this Platonic conclusion:

To Socrates... *doxa* was the formulation in speech of what *dokei moi*, that is, of what appears to me. This *doxa*...comprehended the world as it opens itself to me. It was not, therefore, subjective fantasy...but also not something absolute and valid for all. The assumption was that the world opens up differently to every man, according to his position in it; and that the “sameness” of the world, its commonness (*koinon*) resides in the fact that the same world opens up to everyone and that despite all differences between men and their positions in the world... “both you and I are human.”<sup>8</sup>

Socrates was the champion of *doxa* and his position was, paradoxically enough, closer to the sophists rather than Plato: “If the quintessence of the Sophists’ teaching consisted in the *dyo logoi*, in the insistence that each matter can be talked about in two different ways, then Socrates was the greatest Sophist of them all.”<sup>9</sup> Socrates moved in the *Agora* in the middle of *doxai* and never claimed any possession of knowledge. What Plato called dialectic, Socrates called midwifery: “he wanted to help others give birth to what they have anyhow, to find the truth in their *doxai*.”<sup>10</sup>

The Socratic method of midwifery means this: Every man has his own *doxa*, his own ‘it-seems-to-me’ and from hence Socrates must begin with a question since he does not know what the other possesses. Truth is to be found in this *doxa* after it successfully undergoes the test of confronting other *doxai*. Politically speaking, “Socrates wanted to make the city more truthful by delivering each of the citizens of their truth.”<sup>11</sup> It is noteworthy to say that the word ‘*doxa*’ does not only mean opinion but is also related to ‘fame’ and so it has a political significance in an environment where politics means a public realm where everybody appears and shows himself. The method, to be sure, is dialectic but this dialectic intends to coax the truth out of *doxa* not by destroying it. The well-known Socratic method has a few basic features. First, it presupposes *equality* for no one is superior to the other: everyone has a unique point of view with regard to the world depending on his location in it. The truth or falsity of any opinion depends on surviving the challenges posed to it and the better position one has in relation to the object under discussion. Second, it is not necessary that people engaged in ‘midwifery’ should arrive at any definite conclusion. In fact, they might not arrive at all at any conclusion—something which may give us an insight into why early Socratic dialogues rarely ever

reached a conclusion. Third, Socrates did not want to ‘educate’; he only wanted to ‘talk things through’ with his fellow citizens. This point is of a paramount importance when we contrast it with Plato’s *Republic* which was concerned mainly with *education*. Fourth, the chief criteria for someone who speaks truthfully his *doxa*, as he says in the *Gorgias* 482c, is “to be in agreement with himself, that he does not contradict himself.”

Commenting on this criterion, which Arendt believes to be the most important Socratic discovery, she states that “the fear of contradiction comes from the fact that each of us, “being one”, can at the same time talk with himself...as though he were two. Because I am already two-in-one, at least when I try to think, I can experience a friend...as an “other self”.”<sup>12</sup> Arendt’s point is that the human condition of plurality or human togetherness does not only exist externally in my speaking with other individuals; plurality is *immanent* with regard to the agent who *thinks*, for as long as he thinks he is living together with himself. The fear of contradiction is so crucial since it might destroy my unity as *one*, living in harmony with myself. Arendt believes that one can never escape the condition of plurality; the self is the only thing from which one cannot depart. To Arendt humanity is present in my ever-changing self and she believes that this is the reason why we are sometimes capable of predicting the actions of our fellowmen prior to experiencing them.

Arendt’s characterization of the activity of thinking as a conversation of the two-in-one, that is, me and myself, is of central importance to our study of her conception of political thinking. Although the subject of thinking was touched upon in Arendt’s earlier works, in the present 1954 article she seemed to offer her first tentative positive account of the activity of thinking which she claimed to be Socratic in origin; such an account will not only illuminate her earlier works but also our later discussion of the trial of Eichmann as well as her late essays. To Arendt the faculty of speech corresponds to the human condition of plurality not only in the sense that we speak to other people but in “the even more relevant sense that speaking with myself I live with myself.”<sup>13</sup> This characterization is best illustrated by Aristotle who thought that in the process of thinking “I” live together with “myself” and that I experience this self as a friend, or to use his language “an other self”, “the excellent person is related to his friend in the same way as he is related to himself, since a friend is another himself.”<sup>14</sup> Aristotle also believes that

“the excellent person is of one mind with himself, and desires the same in his own soul.”<sup>15</sup> Arendt’s characterization of thinking as ‘two-in-one’ is the main source from which, she thought, arise two principles: the axiom of contradiction and ethics. With regard to the first, Arendt believed that the axiom of contradiction can be traced to the Socratic discovery of the two-in-one:

Insofar as I am one, I will not contradict myself, but I can contradict myself because in thought I am two-in-one; therefore I do not live only with others, as one, but also with myself. The fear of contradiction is the fear of splitting up, of no longer remaining one, and this is the reason why the axiom of contradiction could become the fundamental rule of thought.<sup>16</sup>

Arendt believed that as long as I think, I am involved in a constant inner dialogue in pure thought between the I-and-myself. The unity of the self depends somehow on the harmony between the two elements which constitute it. Now, since I do not live only by myself in the world, I am always called-out of the dialogue of thought by my fellowmen while speaking to them. I strive to present myself as *one* unique human being by speaking in one single voice. The human condition of plurality and the fear of contradiction urge me constantly to be in agreement with myself so that I can present myself to others as a reliable human being. Of course, I always have the ability to make contradictory statements but the stakes in this case are so high: people might refuse to live or deal with me. As we shall see later in our treatment of *The Human Condition*, Arendt specified one faculty that is responsible for stabilizing the unknown future and keeping our identities, namely, the faculty of making and keeping promises. It is this understanding of the activity of thinking as two-in-one that gave rise to the faculty of promising: I do not only make and keep promises in order to appear as a reliable man, but also because I do not want to live my life contradicting myself. While *appearing* to others as a reliable man presupposes a strong actual sense of plurality, being in harmony with myself allows for a temporary detachment from the world through the activity of thinking although the other is presented potentially in the dialogue between me and myself.

Second, Arendt believes that the two-in-one activity of thinking gives rise to ethics. Once again she defends the Socratic position. Arendt claims that Socrates discovered conscience although he did not have a name for it in his claim that “it is much better to be in disagreement with the whole world than *being one* to be in a disagreement

with myself.<sup>17</sup> Conscience depends on this two-in-one characterization of our mental life or thinking. Arendt claims that “Conscience in its most general sense is...based on the fact that I can be in agreement or disagreement with myself, and that means that I do not only appear to others but also to myself.”<sup>18</sup> Since conscience depends on my agreement with myself, then the question, what is it that the ‘self’ should agree on?’ seems a legitimate question. Arendt’s answer seems to be in favor of commonsense: claims such as “don’t kill”, don’t steal...etc.” are more likely to be accepted as commonsensical, i.e., accepted by almost everybody. However, Arendt believes that the activity of thinking, “two-in-one”, as characterized by Socrates allows him to accept such claims with no difficulty.

Arendt considered an old question that can be found repeatedly in Plato’s dialogues in order to illustrate how the basic experience of two-in-one allowed Socrates to speak of conscience even though he did not have a name for it. Plato’s question took various forms: “whether a good deed, or a just deed, is what it is even ‘if it remains unknown to and hidden before men and gods’<sup>19</sup>,” or “why you should not kill, even under conditions where nobody will see you.”<sup>20</sup> The significance of the Socratic reasoning, as we shall see, is that it takes no refuge in the absolute standards of reason. Socrates, who always thought that men should be in agreement with themselves, Arendt claimed, believed that the reason why you should not kill “is that you cannot possibly want to be together with a murderer. By committing murder you would deliver yourself to the company of a murderer as long as you live.”<sup>21</sup> Moreover, since the plurality of men is already indicated in our two-in-one process of thinking, it is possible that a murderer would realize the wickedness of his action if all men are to act in this way: a murderer for Socrates “is not only condemned to the permanent company of his own murderous self, but he will see all other people in the image of his own action. He will live in a world of potential murderers.”<sup>22</sup> The fact that, insofar as we think, we are in constant dialogue with ourselves means that we are never alone. There are two reasons for rejecting the assumption of a complete solitary life: first, the activity of thinking is in fact an active dialogue between two (I and myself); second, unlike other earthly beings we are able to bring the plurality of men to this inner conversation of pure thought by way of expectations.

Socrates believed that improving citizens begins at home, in the solitary activity of thinking which, paradoxically enough, is not entirely solitary because it internalizes the viewpoints of the others and so it does not depart from the world of men. Unlike Plato, Socrates did not need to postulate absolute standards of reason in order to improve the city and make it ‘moral’--standards that are discoverable by philosophers only. Socrates thought that improving the city-state is possible because its citizens are people capable of thinking by themselves, of offering their unique viewpoints which can only be accepted if they survive the challenge posed to them by other point of views. Socrates’ thinking, which took the form of two-in-one, did not represent anything beyond the world of human affairs. Arendt claimed that to Socrates, “man is not yet a rational animal, a being endowed with the capacity of *reason*, but a thinking being whose thought is manifest in the manner of speech” (Italic added).<sup>23</sup> Socrates believed that a good guarantee of good citizen conduct in the *polis* cannot be some type of ‘education’ that begins with a vision of Truth which consequently leads to molding all behaviors toward some specific ends. Nor did Socrates believe that thoughtless action could guarantee such good citizen behavior. It was a combination of both action and thinking that could provide such assurance: “the awareness that man is a thinking and acting being in one, someone, namely, whose thoughts invariably and unavoidably accompany his acts, is what improves men and citizens...The political relevance of Socrates’ discovery is that it asserts that solitude...is...the necessary condition for the good functioning of the polis, a better guarantee than rules of behavior enforced by laws and fear of punishment.”<sup>24</sup>

With the trial and death of Socrates, the meaning of the activity of thinking was changed and contempt for the world of the city was the mark of all post-Platonic philosophy. Aristotle also felt that another trial, similar to that of Socrates, awaited him and it was reported that he warned the Athenians not to sin twice against philosophy. The only thing that philosophers wanted with respect to politics was to be left alone and to have the freedom to think. In the following summary, we will see what Arendt believed to be the consequences of Socrates’ trial with regard to philosophy and politics:

1. Philosophy departed from the realm of human affairs and there was a split between the man of thought and the man of action. Such a result created the tradition of political thought which has survived two and a half thousand years.

2. Every political philosophy expressed the attitude of the philosopher according to the affairs of his time. This attitude involves the relationship between a philosophical experience and our practices when we move among men. Every political philosophy seems to face the alternative either of interpreting philosophical experience with categories which owe their origin to the realm of human affairs, *or*, of claiming priority for philosophic experience and judging all politics in its light (Plato).
3. Although the philosopher contemplates something which is more than human, i.e., divine, he remains a man *of* the world. Thus, the conflict between philosophy and the affairs of man is ultimately a conflict within the philosopher himself (this is the problem Plato called body and soul). The body lives in the city-state while the divine is contemplated by the soul which is in a sense also divine, for it is immortal. The true philosopher is the one who can separate himself from his body and rule his body as the master rules a slave. And if it happened that the philosopher ruled the city, he will do to its inhabitants no more than what he did to his own body. His tyranny will be justified in the sense of the best government and personal legitimacy, that is, his obedience as a man to the soul. The saying that “those who know how to obey are those who command” has its roots in the relationship between philosophy and politics. Hence, the platonic conflict between the body and the soul expresses in fact the tension between philosophy and politics. No one before Plato, Arendt claims, was aware of the political origin of the problem of soul and body.

Arendt also offers the same explanation of the relation between philosophy and politics or thinking and action in her interpretation of the allegory of the cave. Plato in the cave describes the relation between philosophy and politics in terms of the attitude of the philosopher towards the *polis*. According to Arendt, the parable of the cave is the center of Plato’s political philosophy. There are three stages in the cave: 1. the philosopher frees himself from the fetters which chain the cave dwellers. He turns away from the shadows on the wall, or *doxa*, and sees the fire that illuminates the things in the cave. 2. The *solitary* adventurer, or the philosopher, is not satisfied with the fire in the cave and so he wants to find out where this fire comes from in addition to the causes of things that really

are. 3. The philosopher finds an exit out of the cave which leads him to the clear skies, a landscape with no men or things. In this landscape, Plato envisions the eternal essences of things and men. He also sees the sun, the idea of ideas, which enables the beholder to see and the ideas to shine forth. “This certainly is the climax in the life of the philosopher ,and it is here that the tragedy begins. Being still a mortal man, he does not belong and cannot remain here but must return to the cave as his earthly home, and yet in the cave he can no longer feel at home.”<sup>25</sup> When the philosopher leaves the cave he loses his senses as well as his commonsense; when he returns he cannot tell his fellow men of what he saw because, to them, he simply does not make sense: “They [philosophers upon returning to the cave] can no longer see in the darkness of the cave, they have lost their sense of orientation, they have lost what we would call their commonsense.”<sup>26</sup>

Arendt states that “The allegory of the cave is...designed to depict not so much how philosophy looks from the viewpoint of politics but how politics...looks from the viewpoint of philosophy. And the purpose is to discover in the realm of philosophy those standards which are appropriate for a city of cave dwellers.”<sup>27</sup> Arendt, for her own political reading of the cave, stresses that the allegory does not tell us why the philosopher ignored the need to persuade his fellow prisoners to do what he does. In the end, she wants to show us how the philosophical experience of ‘wonder’ was the main motive for withdrawal from plurality and, therefore, politics. The reason why the philosopher ignored the need to persuade his fellow prisoners to do what he does can be found, according to Arendt, not in the *Republic* but in the *Theaetetus* and the *Seventh Letter*-- the answer is to be found in the notion of *wonder*. “*Thaumadzein*, the wonder at that which is as it is, is according to Plato a *pathos*, something which is endured and as such quite distinct from *doxadzein*, from forming an opinion about something .”<sup>28</sup> Wonder is directed to that which is as it is, while *doxa* is only forming an opinion about the changing things of the world. Wonder, as was told by Plato, is a state of speechlessness since what the philosopher discovers in such a state is too general for words: “It is altogether impossible to talk about this as about other things we learn; rather, from much being together with it...a light is lit as from a flying fire.”<sup>29</sup> Truth to which wonder is directed is beyond words or too general for words. As soon as the state of speechless wonder translates itself into words, Arendt claims, it will be formulated in

unending variations what we might call “ultimate questions”: such as, what is man, what is life...etc; Arendt claims that the common mark for these questions is that they cannot be answered scientifically. These questions are unanswerable, and by asking them, man establishes his existence as a question-asking being. If philosophy begins with wonder and ends with speechlessness, “then it ends exactly where it began. Beginning and end are here the same, which is the most fundamental of the so-called vicious circles that one may find in so many strictly philosophical arguments.”<sup>30</sup>

The philosophical, Platonic, shock of wonder is that which separates philosophers from their fellow citizens. The reason why the philosopher in the cave ignores the need to persuade his fellow prisoners to follow his path “is by no means...that the majority knows nothing of the *pathos* of wonder, but much rather that they refuse to endure it.”<sup>31</sup> Needless to say, such refusal is based on the citizen’s *doxai*, which the philosopher refuses in the first place and finds them intolerable. After the philosophers endure the philosophical shock of wonder and return to the city-state, they find themselves lacking the appropriate *doxa* to compete with other *doxai*. And thus the philosopher finds himself in danger of speaking non-sense as opposed to the *common-sense* of the city. Arendt believes that this speechless wonder endured by philosophers has created a twofold conflict with the city: 1. Since wonder is speechless, philosophers found themselves “outside the political realm in which the highest faculty of man is, precisely, speech”<sup>32</sup> 2. Since the philosophical shock of wonder strikes man in his singularity, he finds himself at odds with the ‘common’ sense of his fellow men. Arendt describes such a state as one of alienation:

He [the philosopher who endures wonder] is to an extent alienated from the city of men...and since his own experience of speechlessness expresses itself only in the raising of unanswerable questions, he is indeed in one decisive disadvantage the moment he returns to the political realm. He is the only one who does not know, the only one who has no distinct and clearly defined *doxa* to compete with other opinions, the truth or untruth of which *common sense* wants to decide, that is, that sixth sense that we not only have in common but which fits us into, and thereby makes possible, a common world (Italic added).<sup>33</sup>

Plato, who was aware of the incompatibility between his speechless wonder and the political realm first hand from Socrates’ trial, tried to extend the experience of wonder

indefinitely, to make it a way of life; and because Plato wanted to prove the usefulness of philosophy in practice, he “deformed philosophy for political purposes, philosophy continued to provide standards and rules, yardsticks and measurements with which the human mind could at least attempt to understand what was happening in the realm of human affairs.”<sup>34</sup> Unlike Plato, Socrates who also went through the experience of speechless wonder, which is an essential part of the human condition, was fully aware that this experience was a *fleeting moment* that could only occur in the course of his living together with others and in his two-in-one solitary thinking which represents the plurality of opinions (we will see later that Arendt’s reading of Socrates presents him as a man of action whose thoughts are only functioning in relationship to the world through opinions, which presuppose experience). Socrates view of himself as a ‘philosopher’ did not lead him into the belief that he had a special ‘truth’ not available to others; rather, he thought that his gift lay in the fact that he must not surrender to the dogmatism of any opinion even if it was agreed upon by the majority of people: “His [Socrates] distinction from his fellow citizens is not that he possesses any special truth from which the multitude is excluded, but that he remains always ready to endure the pathos of wonder and thereby avoids the dogmatism of mere opinion holders.”<sup>35</sup>

With Plato, the actual beginning of western philosophical traditions, politics lost its dignity and the Socratic position was vanished in this process. To the philosopher, politics became the field in which the elementary necessities of human life were taken care of and to which absolute philosophical standards applied. And since politics never conformed to such standards it was judged to be an unethical business, judged so not only by philosophers but by everyone. The break with this tradition came in the modern age, “Machiavelli’s writings are the first sign [of this break]...and in Hobbes we find, for the first time, a philosophy which has no use for philosophy but pretends to proceed from what common sense takes for granted.”<sup>36</sup>

In Arendt’s article there are two alternatives with regard to the relation between philosophy and politics, namely, the model of Socrates and that of Plato. While Socrates considered the realm of politics, the realm of *doxa*, to be the necessary presupposition for the ‘rare’ experience of wonder, Plato thought that the experience of wonder was an enduring process in a realm beyond human *doxai*, a realm of ideas transcending the

‘universal flux.’ Arendt suggested that Plato’s alternative, in its withdrawal from the world of opinions and the radical singularity that he established while enduring the *pathos* of wonder, had destroy[ed] the plurality of the human condition within himself.<sup>37</sup> The Socratic alliance with the realm of *doxai*, on the other hand, is a promising one since it welcomes both persuasion and speech. Socratic ‘truth’, unlike Plato’s, can only be reached by examining our *doxai* and make it more truthful. It implies that *doxa* presupposes equality since the world appears differently to everyone. It also implies that *doxa* presupposes plurality not only in the sense of conversations between people, but also in the fundamental sense that even the process of quite solitary thinking expresses a dialogue with myself.

When Plato avoided the public realm where people freely express and examine their opinions about the world and confined himself to an eternal sphere of ideas, he was able to observe some consequences. He thought that proper solidarity should not exist with the *polis*, but with Truth and he was certain that the way to truth is *dialectic* rather than *midwifery*. Persuasion, the common man’s method of communicating his *doxai*, is not admitted when the philosopher talks about truth since the people of opinion can never comprehend its true meaning. Thus, instead of persuasion, Plato introduced his tyranny of truth which necessarily destroyed all other opinions. As we shall see later, Arendt argued in *The Human Condition* that Plato’s political philosophy employed the concept of work, a concept that begins in the mind in the form of a blueprint, rather than action. On the other hand, looked at from the realm of *doxai*, Truth turned out to be non-sense and was inferior to the *polis* ‘commonsense’.

There is no doubt that Arendt wants to rescue the Socratic model from that of Plato. After all, Arendt did not want the tyranny of truth to prevail in our understanding of politics. Thus, we can see in the Socratic model how philosophy becomes more akin to politics. F. M. Dolan has suggested more than once that Arendt’s take on the relation between philosophy and politics endorses the Socratic model or the *Polis*, “I have described how Arendt makes philosophy friendly to politics by replacing the Platonic opposition of truth and opinion by a Socratic idea of the truth of opinion.”<sup>38</sup> However, Dolan seems to read this endorsement of Socrates as an endorsement of the *polis* or the

political life of the Greeks in general; Dolan assumes that the *polis* represents the Arendtian thought as the ideal lost city:

Arendt's celebration of a *polis* impossible to recover except in the imagination is an exercise in mourning in the grand style, a successful overcoming of her despair for modern intellectual life. And in casting this episode as a symptom of a trauma, Arendt is suggesting that it should spur us to find our way towards a cure—a more supple understanding of thought and action. Her intent is not to live in the past, but, by working through the death of Socrates, to prepare the inheritors of Plato's trauma for a new way to love this world, in the present.<sup>39</sup>

According to Dolan, Arendt mourns the lost *polis* because of her despair within contemporary political thought. Such despair encouraged Arendt to find a cure for the relation between philosophy and politics. Dolan did not suggest that Arendt would blind herself and live in the beautiful dream of the city; Arendt's insight, which is derived from the death of Socrates, was aimed at rethinking philosophy as welcoming politics. Dolan's assumption is a weaker claim of the Graecomania thesis, which confines Arendt literally to the lost Greek *polis* and one that makes it the standard by which every political experience is judged. In fact, he shares the basic claim of Graecomania by asserting Arendt's endorsement of the Greek *polis*' experience. Dolan is not alone in this position: Michael G. Gottsegen seems to suggest that Arendt's concept of action in its Greek origin is the rule by which one is able to gauge modern political societies: "Arendt employs the Greek conception [of action] to measure the shortcomings of the present age."<sup>40</sup> In what follows I will illustrate the reason for rejecting the Graecomania thesis.

1. Hannah Arendt expressed some general dissatisfaction with the *polis*. Margaret Canovan points to the fact that early manuscripts of 'Philosophy and Politics' 1954, show some evidence of criticism against the Greek city: "At several points in the early manuscripts she [Arendt] admits that the institution of slave-owning had already opened a gulf between 'knowing' and 'doing' in practical affairs, and placed the experience of rulership at the base of Greek politics."<sup>41</sup> That Arendt dropped such criticism from the version delivered at the University of Notre Dame can be attributed to many 'technical' reasons since she did not intend to publish the essay-- at least at the time when she delivered it. That Arendt believed

- in such criticism, which indicates her general dissatisfaction with the Greek experience, seems to be supported by the following remarks.
2. In Arendt's *The Human Condition*, the subject of our next discussion, Arendt discovered that the Greek version of the activity of action, the highest and most political activity of the *vita activa*, has some defects. Arendt believed that these defects call for redemption and she concludes that such redemption was *not* Greek in origin. The disabilities of the activity of action are two: unpredictability and irreversibility. The unpredictability of action springs from the fact that action is boundless, i.e., it continuously entails new relationships and reactions. A statement that I make on any subject or an action in any situation, for example, might have different reactions with many people; such reactions are themselves actions which might entail further reactions and so on. Thus, it is almost impossible for an actor to predict the consequences of his action. This inability to foretell the consequences of our own very actions is its first frustration, its unpredictability. Irreversibility of action, on the other hand, means that whenever an action is done it can never be undone, or alternatively, you can never undo what is already done. The predicaments or disabilities of action are redeemed by two potentialities of action itself. Irreversibility is redeemed by the faculty of *forgiving*; unpredictability is redeemed by the faculty of making and holding a *promise*. Jacques Taminiaux, in an excellent note on these modes of action-redemption, claims that the Greek experience of action was 'insufficient': "it is important to note that, according to Arendt, neither of the abovementioned modes redemption [promising and forgiving] were recognized by the Greeks as intrinsic potentialities of action."<sup>42</sup> As we will discuss later, the role of forgiveness in human affairs, Arendt believes, is discovered by Jesus of Nazareth while the power of promising as an intrinsic part of action can be traced back to the Roman legal system.
  3. It is probable that Arendt herself had contributed to her alleged Graecomania by presenting the tension between thinking and acting or philosophy and politics in Greek context. However, one should not simply accept Arendt's account of the tension between philosophy and politics as springing *directly* from the trial and

death of Socrates. This is in fact an absurd hypothesis. The death of Socrates is a historical accidental matter and if we were inclined to believe that the tension between philosophy and politics is necessarily due to the death of Socrates, then we would force ourselves to accept the conclusion that if Socrates did not exist, then philosophy and politics would live in harmony. This conclusion contradicts what Arendt believes: the tension is inherent in the activity of thinking and acting and Arendt was mainly concerned with *describing* both activities. The trial and death of Socrates should be accepted as a *story*, a way of explaining something by giving an example, where the example is not to be taken too seriously. Now, if the trial and death of Socrates, as linked to the tension between philosophy and politics, are to be taken as a story or even a fiction--something that is not necessarily historical--why did she introduce it in the first place? A reasonable answer is suggested by Aristotle's *poetics*.

Aristotle in his analysis of tragedy confronted the fact that poets are more inclined to use historical names. Reflecting on the reasons for this inclination, he states "The reason is that what is possible is persuasive; so what has not happened we are not yet ready to believe is possible, while what has happened is, we feel, obviously possible: for it would not have happened if it were impossible."<sup>43</sup> Aristotle, indeed, goes on to claim that "it is absurd to go searching for this kind of authentication [i.e. to see whether the poet's heroes do exist in history]."<sup>44</sup> Aristotle's point is that the poet does not imitate names and characters of history, but rather, 'he imitates *action*'.<sup>45</sup> The Aristotelian insight might help us understand Arendt's concept of action, of which Socrates is a champion, not as a theoretical but as a practical, possible activity relevant to politics. Arendt was not concerned with the Socratic position as such; rather, she was concerned with this important activity which she seems to present as an existential fact of being human. By presenting it through Greek context Arendt did not mean to confine this activity to any historical background--she was solely concerned with articulating 'action' through an 'example.' Margaret Canovan seems to suggest the same view, "Arendt suggests that Plato's anti-political utopia represented an attempt to resolve a conflict *that would have been present even without the trial of Socrates*, namely a conflict within the philosopher

himself between two kinds of experience, the life of the citizen and the life of the mind (Italic added).”<sup>46</sup>

The divorce of philosophy from politics or thinking from action was the immediate result of Socrates' trial and his subsequent death. It was apparent that Plato did betray the fundamentals of his great teacher and Arendt strives to tell us that this divorce, which influenced prominent philosophers over centuries, was unfounded. Thinking in a Platonic fashion is an impossible business because we can never think in absolute detachment from the world and men. The process of thinking, as characterized by Arendt, is ultimately a dialogue between two; an inner conversation between ‘me and myself’—a conversation where the world as well as the others are presented or re-present in the mind in the form of a thought with which the self initiates a dialogue. Plato’s mistake was presenting to his mind something that is found nowhere in experience, an ideal or a standard according to which politics must conform, and since politics never conformed to such standards he despised all political activities and action.

Socrates’ version of thinking has great affinity to the world of men and thus it forms an alternative to Plato’s tyrannical understanding of politics. Socrates was presented to us as a man of action whose thinking was only functioning in relationship to the world through opinions which presuppose experience. The process of Socratic thinking was not confined to the solitary sense of ‘two-in-one’ although it presupposes it; it is related to other speaking individuals when they present to me and to themselves how the world is disclosed to them. True political life depends on this constant questioning of our lives, which must not be accepted as a given unchanging fact.

Arendt’s articulation of political thinking, as it should be clear by now, is a gradual process that takes place through her treatment of many different subjects. We saw her first touches upon this question while discussing her involvement with Jewish affairs and the Palestinian question. In her ‘Philosophy and Politics,’ Arendt turned her attention towards the tradition of western political thinking. However, Arendt’s treatment of the appropriate mode of thinking pertaining to politics and political thinking, which appeared in her analysis of the political activity par excellence, action, suffered from some limitations: Arendt in this article was concerned with action in so far as it is distinct from Platonic thinking and so she did not offer us a complete description of this activity. To

overcome such limitations, the activity of action became a crucial subject of her celebrated book, *The Human Condition*. In what follows, I will outline her treatment of political thinking in this book, which intends to provide a phenomenological map of the different activities of the *vita activa*.

### ***The Human Condition***

*The Human Condition*, first published in 1958, is a central stage in Arendt's intellectual development. In a sense, this work attempts to explicate some concepts that were either discussed or implied in Arendt's earlier works. Action is the most important of these concepts. To avoid any misunderstanding, Arendt distinguished between the human condition and human nature. The first is everything that enters into any relationship with men and functions as a condition for them: "whatever touches or enters into a sustained relationship with human life immediately assumes the character of a condition of human existence."<sup>47</sup> Although we humans are the creators of things like institutions and languages, we are constantly 'conditioned' by them. Regarding the second, Arendt believes that it is difficult for human beings to explain the meaning of human nature. This is partly because "nothing entitles us to assume that man has a nature or essence in the same sense as other things. In other words, if we have a nature or essence, then surely only a god could know and define it, and the first prerequisite would be that he be able to speak about a 'who' as though it were a 'what'."<sup>48</sup> According to Arendt, 'who' a human being is is different from his 'whatness'. The latter comprises what is common between all human beings such as the constitution of their biological organism while the first includes all that is unique to any individual such as his character which is shaped by specific events, or his constantly changing 'life story' which can scarcely be repeated with another human being. Arendt believes that it is difficult for human beings to speak of 'human nature' since any comprehension of such nature requires that we include not only knowledge of human 'whatness' but also of 'whoness,' which seems to be an impossible business. Generally speaking, Arendt seems to reject the belief that there is something like 'human nature' in the first place, which includes prior knowledge of 'whatness' and whoness,' but she did not expand on this point; she merely

asserted that if there is something like ‘human nature’ “then only a god could know and define it.”

Arendt’s aim in this work is simply “to think what we are doing”; the book “deals only with the most elementary articulations of the human condition, with those activities that traditionally, as well as according to current opinion, are within the range of every human being.”<sup>49</sup> For this and other reasons, Arendt seems to exclude the ‘activity’ of thought: “the highest and perhaps purest activity of which men are capable, the activity of thinking, is left out of these present considerations.”<sup>50</sup> Arendt intends to analyze three activities: labor, work and action, all of which constitute the *vita activa*, ‘human life insofar as it is actively engaged in doing something.’ The explicit aim of Arendt’s work is to give a description of the three activities of the *vita activa*, but the implicit goal, I believe, is to contrast the crucial political activity, action, with the other constituents of active life. Arendt’s concern with the activity of action leads to an important distinction in her book between the public and the private realms.

The distinction or the separation between the public and the private realm is taken for granted, Arendt believes, by most Greek philosophers. To the Greeks, life spent in the private is a life spent in the realm of the household. The distinctive trait of this private realm is *necessity* since “in it men lived together because they were driven by their wants and needs.”<sup>51</sup> Men in the private realm are not different from any species that needs the company of others in order to live. The urgency of ‘life’ is obvious in all the roles of the household: men ‘labor’ to provide the living of the family while women sustain the species by giving birth. The public realm or the sphere of the *Polis* is marked by *freedom*. The public Greek realm was free because it is shared by equals, unlike the household, which is dominated by authority of man over other members of the family.

What all Greek philosophers, no matter how opposed to *polis* life, took for granted is that freedom is exclusively located in the political realm, that necessity is primarily a prepolitical phenomenon, characteristic of the private household organization, and that force and violence are justified in this sphere because they are the only means to master necessity—for instance, by ruling over slaves—and to become free.<sup>52</sup> The Greeks understood freedom in relation to the necessity of the household; to free oneself means to be free from the realm of necessity and to participate in the political realm shared by equals.

As we shall see later in our analysis of action, the public space is the sphere where everyone discloses himself as a unique person through the faculty of speech. This unique disclosure of the 'who' in the public realm is nowhere to be found in the realm of necessity where everyone is bound to his or her duty-- conformism is the rule in the household. While the disclosure of the 'who' takes place through the faculty of speech and since this disclosure is absent in the private realm, the household is characterized as a mute sphere.

It is also important to contrast the two realms from the standpoint of reality. The private, seen from the vantage point of the public realm, is a dark place deprived of worldliness; it is a place of hiding from the equals who share the public realm. The public realm, on the other hand, is the space where political actors gather. Arendt believes that the term 'public' signifies 'appearance': "everything that appears in public can be seen and heard by everybody and has the widest possible publicity. For us, appearance...constitutes reality ."53 Reality is reaffirmed when it is witnessed by many perspectives in different locations of the world, which in turn are also seen and heard by others: "the reality of the public realm relies on the simultaneous presence of innumerable perspectives and aspects in which the common world presents itself and for which no common measurement can ever be devised."54 It is difficult to provide any measurements or rules for viewing the common world because those who present their perspectives have different locations in the world and so they see the *same* reality differently. Arendt believes that the identity of anything can be determined by disclosing itself to many perspectives and although these perspectives yield different 'opinions' about the object, they *agree* that they are talking about one and the same object. Such *agreements*, Arendt believes, give rise to a reliable common world or reality: "Only where things can be seen by many in a variety of aspects without changing their identity, so that those who are gathered around them know they see sameness in utter diversity, can worldly reality truly and reliably appear."55

Now, the 'common world' which is established through this identity-through-diversity is not immune from threats. There are cases where the identity of the world can no longer be discerned and this is due either to the elimination of all opinions or to the unanimity of opinions regarding one object. The first case where all opinions are

eliminated, Arendt believes, takes place “under conditions of radical isolation, where nobody can any longer agree with anybody else, as is usually the case under tyrannies.”<sup>56</sup> The second case where the common world is threatened by unanimity of opinions can be found under conditions of mass hysteria or mass society: “But it may also happen [that the common world is destroyed] under conditions of mass society or mass hysteria, where we see all people suddenly behave as though they were members of one family, each multiplying and prolonging the perspective of his neighbor.”<sup>57</sup> The subject of mass society is an important subject in Arendt’s treatment of *The Human Condition* and it constitutes the essence of her critique of the modern age, which we will discuss later. Arendt’s charge against any unanimity of opinions is that it runs counter the human condition of plurality; the fact that there is no proper disclosure of different points of view was always considered by Arendt as a sign of fanaticism--the sign of introducing Truth to the realm of politics. It is significant that this critique of the modern age was anticipated by Arendt in her critique of the Jewish attitude towards Palestine, which was described by her as a radical change in the national character. As we saw in the first chapter, the unanimity of Jewish opinions concerning the establishment of a Jewish state tended to justify everything, even the use of violence, as the proper means of politics:

Unanimity of opinion is a very ominous phenomenon, and one characteristic of our modern mass age. It destroys social and personal life, which is based on the fact that we are different by nature and by conviction. To hold different opinions and to be aware that other people think differently on the same issue shields us from that godlike certainty which stops all discussion and reduces social relationships to those of an ant heap. A unanimous public opinion tends to eliminate bodily those who differ, for mass unanimity is not the result of an agreement, but an expression of fanaticism and hysteria. In contrast to agreement, unanimity does not stop at certain well defined objects, but spreads like an infection into every related issue.<sup>58</sup>

The threat to the common world from tyrannies or mass society is characterized by Arendt as a loss of man’s concern for the world. In a tragic tone Arendt criticizes the emergence of such an ominous phenomenon.

In both instances, men have become entirely private, that is, they have been deprived of seeing and hearing others, of being seen and heard by them. They are all imprisoned in the subjectivity of their own singular experience, which does not cease to be singular if

the same experience is multiplied innumerable times. The end of the common world has come when it is seen only under one aspect and is permitted to present itself in only one perspective.<sup>59</sup>

Arendt noticed that the distinction between the public and the private realm had disappeared in the modern age, which coincided with the rise of 'society'; she believed that in this emergence of society human individuality is submerged in a collective life process. In such a society, politics would indeed 'wither away', since the sole purpose would be 'the entertaining of the life process' of a 'socialized mankind'. The political implications of the emergence of 'society' are great. However, let us discuss further what Arendt meant by 'society'. 'Society' is to be contrasted with the authentic public realm, which is supposed to be the site where freedom and plurality are actualized as we saw earlier. In this genuine public realm the world opens up to every opinion and the unity of this world is preserved by these opinions. 'Society' is a distorted version of the authentic public realm since unity and conformity prevail within it. The unity of people in society is artificial since they are united in order to 'make living'. Arendt believes that such unity is apt to make everyone private since it is concerned primarily with production and consumption in a common economy and common mass culture. People are united in 'society' because their needs and desires are the same and are catered for collectively. Unity in society is not a genuine unity based on agreements; it is, rather, *uniformity*.

Arendt stressed the fact that the ancient concept of economy made it a private matter for each household. She also explained that the development of market economy, which engulfed the whole population, tended to unite many households together. These united households began to demand that a new public authority, the state, should protect and manage this network of private interests. When the concern for life becomes the major concern of the public, people tend to ignore all other concerns of politics. They only see politics as an administration of the life of mankind. The deepest concern of any society, Arendt believes, is the concern for the life of mankind and this concern paved the way for the government of administration. The political form that corresponds to society is not democracy, but bureaucracy "charged with national housekeeping."<sup>60</sup>

Part of the story about the 'withering away' of the public realm and its celebrated activity of action in the modern age is related to Arendt's analysis of the activities of

work and labor. She believed that political action has been replaced by work and labor, which also have political implications. As we saw earlier, Arendt was concerned with different types of thinking and their effects on politics: she discussed assimilationist thinking, which she criticized based on its failure to represent the true identities of individual actors; she also discussed ideological thinking which she rejected as being detached from reality. In the present work, *The Human Condition*, Arendt attempted to elucidate the best political activity, action, and tried to contrast it with other two activities, which she believed were implicit in replacing action throughout centuries. In what follows I will discuss Arendt's phenomenological description of both activities.

### **1. Labor and the *animal laborans*.**

The activity of labor has close relation to *nature*, or to use Arendt's favorite term, the earth. Arendt likes to use Marx's definition of labor: "labor is man's metabolism with nature." The affinity between labor and nature appears in the fact that man in labor is not concerned with anything as much as he is concerned with his life, his survival. The following is a brief sketch of the most important features of labor as described by Arendt.

1. The fruits of man's labor are immediately consumed for they are the "fuel of life". Its products, however, to use Arendt's terminology, "are the least worldly and at the same time the most natural of all things."<sup>61</sup> In a sense, man in the activity of labor is close to animals and the only difference between the two is that the latter consume what they find without labor, while humans do transform what they find and then consume it. As long as man is concerned with the survival of his species he will remain one of the many species on the face of the earth
2. Cyclical movements seem to control both the laborer and the 'products' of his labor. Arendt quotes Locke in his description of the products of labor: "all those 'good things' which are 'really useful to the life of man', to the 'necessity of subsisting', are 'generally of short duration, such as—if they are not consumed by use—will decay and perish by themselves'."<sup>62</sup> The laborer who is a living organism is also subject to such cyclical movement: "Cyclical, too, is the movement of the living organism, the human body not excluded, as long as it can withstand the process that permeates its being and makes it alive."<sup>63</sup> The natural movement of life goes in a circle which dictates growth and decay to which all living beings are subject. The products of labor are also *repetitive* in the sense that they are produced to be consumed by the laborer

who will produce them again so that he can survive and so *ad infinitum* 3. Labor is also characterized as *necessary* since it is the answer to our biological needs 4. Labor, like any other productive process, tends to produce a surplus more than what is necessary to keep the generation going. It therefore has the potential for limitless growth on which modern economic and social developments are based 5. Since labor is understood as a matter of supplying the necessities of life for an individual, labor is said to be private.

Arendt also noticed that the process of thinking is similar to that of labor: “the underlying tie between the laborer of the hand and the laborer of the head is again the laboring process, in one case performed by the head, in the other by some other part of the body. Thinking...comes to an end only with life itself.”<sup>64</sup> Thinking, however, is less productive than labor, “if labor leaves no permanent trace, thinking leaves nothing permanent at all.”<sup>65</sup> The activity of thinking, by itself, is unable to make anything real; if the thinker decides to materialize his thoughts then he must stop thinking and begin to use his hands.

Labor was historically despised because it is associated with pain and toil, it lacks freedom, and it satisfies only the basic needs of life. Labor, as seen by Arendt, cannot be the best activity in political life since it advocates uniformity or sameness, unlike the activity of action where the disclosure of the unique identity of the actor is central to the activity itself. . Understanding politics in terms of labor means surrendering human values altogether--this is because labor lacks freedom and is confined to the endless natural cycle of ‘life’. Because labor is motivated by biological needs and wants, human beings can no longer distinguish themselves from other laborers. Since labor does not involve other human beings or a permanent world (except in the process of laboring which would also satisfy each laborer individually and hence in its *privacy*) it was judged to be *worldless*. If labor is introduced to the authentic public realm, it will turn it into a ‘society’—the space where unity and conformity prevail. The rise of the modern society of job holders, which distorted the meaning of politics and the public realm, is due to the introduction of the activity of labor into the public realm. The predicament of the *animal laborans* or the activity of labor which is “its imprisonment in the ever-recurring cycle of the life process, of being forever subject to the necessity of labor and consumption”<sup>66</sup>,

cannot be redeemed by the activity of labor itself: the redemption of the activity of labor can be achieved by the activity of work, which we are going to discuss next:

Only through the mobilization of another human capacity, the capacity for making, fabricating, and producing of *homo faber*, who as a tool maker not only eases the pain and trouble of laboring but also erects a world of durability. The redemption of life, which is sustained by labor, is worldliness, which is sustained by fabrication.<sup>67</sup>

## **2. Work and the *homo faber*.**

While the products of labor are always consumed and thus have no permanence in the world, the products of work are durable even when they are worn out as a result of use: “The durability of the human artifice is not absolute; the use we make of it, even though we do not consume it, uses it up.”<sup>68</sup> Building an ‘objective’ world, independent of its makers, is the main goal of the *homo faber*. The process of fabrication, as Plato and Aristotle noticed, begins in the mind of the maker in the form of an idea, or a blueprint in which the mental image has already received some materialization. This idea or blueprint works as a model that makes every step in the process of fabrication predictable. The idea in the mind and the work of the hand cannot by themselves make an object; they need materials to be worked upon. But material itself “is already a product of human hands which have removed it from its natural location, either killing a life process, as in the case of the tree which must be destroyed in order to provide wood... This element of violation and violence is present in all fabrication, and *homo faber*, the creator of the human artifice, has always been the destroyer of nature.”<sup>69</sup> This violence done to nature can never be found in the case of *animal laborans* since he is part of the natural order himself, that is to say, his sustenance from the fruits of the earth or his agriculture nourishes life rather than destroying it. To be sure, there might be some kind of destruction done to nature in the case of *animal laborans*, but this destruction cannot be justly compared to that of the *homo faber*. For example, a fisherman who catches fish only for his family survival does not destroy nature in the way industry does by catching fish to make profit.

As in the activity of labor, the process of making is determined by the categories of means and ends. However, because of its lack of worldly permanence, the process of labor is not determined by its end product; the finished product immediately becomes a

means of subsistence and reproduction of labor power. It is this kind of repetition inherent in the activity of labor that eliminates the possibility of its product to be taken seriously, “one must eat in order to labor and must labor in order to eat.”<sup>70</sup> The product of work, on the contrary, with its relative permanence in the world and its invention of tools, gave rise to the new experience of instrumentality. The fact that *homo faber* is concerned with the categories of means and ends leads to the realization that any end has the potentiality of becoming a means: “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...During the work process, everything is judged in terms of suitability and usefulness for the desired end, and for nothing else.”<sup>71</sup> It is this predicament of *homo faber* that will lead to another higher activity which is supposed to redeem it. The predicament of the activity of work is that “the utility standard inherent in the very activity of fabrication is that the relationship between means and end on which it relies is very much like a chain whose every end can serve again as a means in some other context.”<sup>72</sup>

The *Homo Faber* mentality which transforms every end into a means for further ends paves the way for utilitarianism, ‘the philosophy of *homo faber* par excellence’. Arendt believes that this utilitarian mentality which is entangled in a chain of ends and means has “an innate incapacity to understand the distinction between utility and meaningfulness, which we express linguistically by distinguishing between ‘in order to’ and ‘for the sake of’.”<sup>73</sup> In addition to the charge of the utilitarian lack of meaningfulness in which we do (A) solely for the sake of (B) where (B) is an end in itself and bestows meaningfulness on (A), Arendt also believes that this utilitarian mentality ends in a vicious circle:

The perplexity of utilitarianism is that it gets caught in the unending chain of means and ends without ever arriving at some principle which could justify the category of means and end, that is, of utility itself. The “in order to” has become the content of the “for the sake of”; in other words, utility established as meaning generates meaninglessness.<sup>74</sup> Arendt’s point is a simple one: the ideal of utility, which suggests that everything is chosen because of its usefulness, cannot justify its basic claim, that is, its own utility--a

question such as Lessing's 'what is the use of use' cannot be meaningfully answered by any traditional consistent utilitarian; the ideal of utility was wrongly understood in terms of 'for the sake of', i.e., a principle which is an end in itself. An end in the utilitarian understanding cannot produce any meaning since as soon as it is attained it ceases to be an end, which is supposed to guide and justify the means. The fleeting nature of ends is the reason for its incapacity to produce meaning. Arendt's understanding of meaning, however, gives it a permanent character, "Meaning...must be permanent and lose nothing of its character, whether it is achieved or, rather, found by man or fails man and is missed by him."<sup>75</sup> The way out of this unending chain of means and ends, the predicament of *homo faber*, Arendt believes, is "to declare that one thing or another is "an end in itself".<sup>76</sup> However, in the world of *homo faber* where every end must be of some use, even this end-in-itself which confers meaning upon our actions must also be of some use.

The issue at stake is not the articulation of the concept of work; it is, rather, the generalization of the *homo faber* experience and its political implications. Arendt believed that the greater part of western political philosophy since Plato "could easily be interpreted as various attempts to find theoretical foundations and practical ways for an escape from politics altogether"—an escape "from the frailty of human affairs into the solidity of quiet and order."<sup>77</sup> We will see later that Arendt characterizes the realm of action or politics as a fragile sphere and that such fragility was well understood by Greek philosophers. Plato, Arendt suggested, had substituted making for acting in the political realm in the hope that he would overcome the frailty of action; Arendt believed that Plato's challenge was more explicit in his doctrine of ideas in which these 'ideas' became standards and rules of behavior. Understanding 'ideas' in this normative way, Arendt believed, "was necessary to apply the doctrine of ideas to politics."<sup>78</sup> These ideas are contemplated by the philosopher-king who would use them "as standards and rules by which to measure and under which to subsume the varied multitude of human deeds and words with the same absolute, 'objective' certainty with which the craftsman can be guided in making and the layman in judging individual beds by using the unwavering ever-present model, the 'idea' of bed in general."<sup>79</sup> Ideal rulership, as Plato was convinced, does not involve any personal interest since the ideas are objective and the way in which the philosopher applies his ideas to the realm of politics is similar to the

way a craftsman applies different standards in order to produce a product. It is in this sense Plato stated in the *Republic* that he ‘makes’ the city as the sculptor makes a statue. By interpreting ‘acting’ in terms of ‘fabricating’ Plato established himself as the first philosopher “to design a blueprint for the making of political bodies.”<sup>80</sup>

Plato’s celebration of the activity of making made politics a product that has a specific goal and although he intended in the *Republic* to provide a concept of justice that would be accepted by everybody, he claimed that “the wish of the philosopher to become a ruler of men can spring only from the fear of being ruled by those who are worse.”<sup>81</sup> When politics becomes a means for other purposes, such as the safety of the philosopher or the fear to be ruled by the bad or the medieval salvation of soul, it loses its value and becomes a mere instrument. It is not surprising that the emergence of utopias could be the result of this special kind of thinking that produces political systems shaped after a model within the mind. Thinkers who were able to produce utopias believed that they were experts in human affairs and that they held a perfect model to which politics must conform. However, Arendt believed that ‘political thinking’ in the form of ‘making’ which gave rise to utopias in few instances in history “broke down quickly under the weight of reality.”<sup>82</sup> Although these utopian projects were doomed, they had a great influence on traditional political thinking which was hostile to the frailty of action and eventually decided to interpret it in terms of fabrication.

It is important to note that this critique of political thinking shaped after the activity of work, as interpreted by Arendt in *The Human Condition*, is not a new one. In our earlier discussions of the Jewish question we might remember Arendt’s critique of Herzl: he proceeded from a blueprint of the Jewish state, which turned out to be the Zionist ideology, and that only the elite are responsible for implementing such an idea. Herzl, Arendt stated, thought that the emancipation of Jews all over the world could be attained by securing a Jewish homeland and that this goal was possible through accepting gentile anti-Semitism. Herzl used this acceptance in order to succeed in urging the governments of the gentile world to support his effort of securing a land for Jews outside of Europe--since both the Zionists and the governments of the gentiles would agree on moving Jews outside of Europe. Herzl doubted the efficiency of people’s actions because they are “poor, uneducated and irresponsible”, and so instead of mobilizing the Jewish

masses he decided to move his politics from above, namely, from the level of gentile governments and Jewish elite. Bernard Lazare, whose political thinking was supported by Arendt, thought that the emancipation of Jews cannot be attained by escaping from antisemitism but through a mobilization of the Jewish people against their foes. Lazare, as Arendt stated, never despised ordinary Jews and did not share Herzl's idea that politics must be conducted from above. Emancipation, he thought, begins when Jews take action and become aware of their political responsibility and cease to "live on the alms of their wealthy brethren." It is important to realize that Herzl's fear of action led him to replace it with 'making' to use the language of *The Human Condition* and so he became a fabricator in the political realm.

Herzl also, Arendt believed, became a political fabricator when he turned Zionism into an ideology. Herzl not only indicated that the elite or governments should be concerned with the common interest of the people, but also that politics must derive its validity from something beyond the accidental nature of action, namely, the "guide" or "key to history." Although I am not going to repeat our discussion in the earlier chapter, it is important to see that Herzl's rejection of action is a result of introducing ideology into the realm of politics. Ideology functioned as a 'blueprint' according to which politics must conform. Herzl, like Plato, became a fabricator in the political realm; equipped with the 'logic' of the idea or blueprint, he needed only to apply it to reality. The results were tragic in both cases, both projects broke down the moment they touched reality: Plato's project was a miserable failure when applied to reality and Herzl's led to a state where the basic feeling of security is lost.

Imprisonment in the eternal cycle of life and being subjected to the necessity of labor, the predicament of *animal laborans*, can only be redeemed by the capacity of fabrication, which by erecting a world of durability eases the pain and trouble of *animal laborans*. The activity of fabrication generated another problem which consisted in the 'devaluation of all values' or meaninglessness, an immediate result of turning every end into a means for further ends. The predicament of *homo faber* can be redeemed only through an activity of a higher level: "*homo faber* could be redeemed from his predicament of meaninglessness...only through the interrelated faculties of action and

speech, which produce meaningful stories as naturally as fabrication produces use objects.”<sup>83</sup> The activity of action is the subject of the following section.

### **3. Action.**

“Human plurality, the basic condition of both action and speech has the twofold character of equality and distinction.”<sup>84</sup> This is how Arendt opened her discussion of the political activity par excellence, action. If we were not equal then it would be impossible for us to understand each other; if we were not distinct from each other then we would need neither speech nor action to make ourselves understood by others. Through speech and action we appear to each other not as physical objects but as persons capable of offering and communicating new points of view with regard to the world. Action in general is a mode of performance which implies an appearing subject. In action there is someone who appears and who discloses *who* he is--a disclosure that takes place through both speech and action. The disclosure of the ‘who’, which is implicit in everything an individual says or does, must reveal a person’s uniqueness, at least in situations where the freedom of the individual is taken for granted. This is very different from the activity of fabrication. In the activity of work we do not care who the fabricator is as we only care for the end-product. In a sense, the fabricator can be replaced by anyone who ‘*knows how*’. In action, on the contrary, we cannot replace the agent for his uniqueness is what’s at stake.

“To act, in its most general sense, means to take an initiative, to begin... This beginning is not...the beginning of something but of somebody, who is a beginner himself.”<sup>85</sup> Arendt suggested that the ontological foundation of action lies in the human capacity of giving birth or human natality. Politically speaking, giving birth becomes the human capacity of inserting oneself into life as an unrepeatable, unique individual. When Arendt characterized the activity of the actor as a beginning she implied a crucial distinction between action and work. In the activity of work the *homo faber* begins making *something* that is of use. The acting individual does not make or aim at *making* something; indeed, he produces no tangible results at all; however, as we shall see later, collective action actually ‘produces’ what Arendt called the ‘web of human affairs’.

Generally speaking, the actor’s main task is to make sure that he discloses himself spontaneously in his uniqueness. It is this analysis that led many commentators to believe that Arendt’s concept of action made it a pure performance. I do not think that this is the

case but I will save this discussion to the end of this section after we have completed our exposition of the concept of action. Now, since action cannot appear without an agent, Arendt believes that “action needs for its full appearance the shining brightness we once called glory, and which is possible only in the public realm.”<sup>86</sup> As we saw earlier, the public realm is the sphere of freedom where different views with regard to the world come to be. When different agents disclose themselves through opinions about the world, not only their freedom but also their living in a common world is guaranteed. Glory or fame as we seen earlier is implied in the Greek understanding of *doxa* and so it seems that Arendt take this glory or fame as one of the motivations for action. It is impossible to think of action without an appearing actor since this will transform action into mere achievement: “Without the disclosure of the agent in the act, action loses its specific character and becomes one form of achievement among others.”<sup>87</sup> In fact, the separation of the agent from the act will transform the nature of the act itself: action would lose its capacity for disclosing someone--something which will make any action nothing more than a means to an end. Anything that an actor does or says must bear a relation to him since it will reveal *his* point of view regarding the world. Arendt told us that there are moments in history where such a separation does in fact occur; they take place “whenever human togetherness is lost, that is, when people are only for or against other people.”<sup>88</sup> In cases of war, for example, speech loses its meaningfulness; it ceases to be a disclosure and it becomes a mere means to an end such as when speech is used to deceive an enemy or used for propaganda purposes. Speech in these instances, as Arendt describes it, becomes ‘mere talk’.

Action, which might also take the form of speech, has a strong relation to both: men and the world. Arendt believed that action and speech go in several directions: first, toward men, as when we personally describe other people; second, between men, where speech usually take the form of a conversation ‘between’ people; third, toward the world, as in the case of describing something objective. The process of describing an object, Arendt believed, must keep its agent-revealing capacity even when the content of such description is ‘objective’. The spontaneous manifestation of the agent, the ‘who’, through speech or action in the former directions or locations creates what Arendt called “the web of human affairs.” This web, while visible, since it is either in the form of action or

speech, “retains a curious intangibility.”<sup>89</sup> Arendt believed that philosophers throughout history were troubled by this web of human affairs: it has always been difficult to distinguish ‘who’ the agent is from his ‘whatness’; she believed that even our languages contributed to such unequivocal verbal expression in that the moment we want to describe ‘who’ the agent is, i.e., describing his unique qualities, our language leads us into describing ‘what’ he is, into qualities that he shares with others. Now, since the web of human affairs is a manifestation of the ‘who’, it consequently suffers the same fate: describing this ‘web’ is also a controversial pursuit. Part of this controversy is related to the intangibility of the web of human affairs, but Arendt emphasized time and again that such intangibility does not make the web of human affairs ‘less real’. Of course, acting or speaking does not produce tangible objects like work, but to say that it has no consequences is simply unrealistic.

It is important to note that the web of human affairs, according to Arendt, has a few basic features. First, the web has a relation not only to the agent of whom it is a disclosure, but also to the world since “most words and deeds are *about* some worldly objective reality.”<sup>90</sup> The web of human affairs is more or less the result of men’s interest in the world through their words and deeds. Second, Arendt talked about this web as something that arises spontaneously whenever men exist together in the mode of togetherness and she also suggested that this web varies with each group of people. Arendt was against any claim that would predict future objectives and inspirations of any nation as if there were a hidden hand or spirit beyond history; she believed that the web of human affairs owes its existence to the human capacity of freedom which makes all action unpredictable to a certain degree. We shall see later that this unpredictability of action is the sign of a healthy body politic. Although Arendt did not address this point in detail, it is not hard for her readers to conclude that she did not attribute any absolute stability to the web of human affairs. The fact that this web owes its existence to the human capacity of freedom and its dependence on different human worldly interests makes the web of human affairs somehow fragile, at least when its transformation is possible if men ‘agreed’ to change the course of their action. The fragility of the web, however, should not lead us to the conclusion that it is useless; in fact, it is relatively stable and functions as the ‘assumption’ of any new action. The function of the web will

be explained in the next point. Third, Arendt believes that action presupposes the web of human affairs, “The disclosure of the ‘who’ through speech, and the setting of a new beginning through action, always fall into an already existing web where their immediate consequences can be felt.”<sup>91</sup> The meaning of any action, Arendt believes, cannot be understood without an already existing background. A good or evil deed cannot be understood as such in isolation from a surrounding environment that informs our decision that it is so. In light of our earlier discussion about the web of human affairs and its different forms within each group of people, the ‘background’ function of the web begins to make more sense: our actions and judgments cannot be judged as desirable or undesirable in themselves in isolation from a cultural background. Fourth, Arendt believes that it is “because of this already existing web of human relationships, with its innumerable, conflicting wills and intentions, that action almost never achieves its purpose.”<sup>92</sup> One can understand the scarcity of purposes achieved by action if we attempt to contrast it with the activity of work. The *homo faber*, who is a master over his material, has a sense of confidence, derived from his know-how, that he will transform the raw material out into a product shaped after his mental image. The actor’s action, on the contrary, as soon as it is out there in the world, gets entangled by many conflicting wills and desires to the extent that the actor will end up a sufferer. It is rare that an actor’s point of view would find its way of becoming a fact in the world due to the simple reason that there are many contradictory and challenging points of views thanks to the web of human relationships. However, Arendt insists that action ‘produces’ something different in nature from the solid products of work. When an individual discloses himself through action and speech, his actions eventually emerge as his unique life story. Arendt believes that stories emerge as naturally as work produces tangible things. People might solidify these stories in tangible things, say with monuments or works of art, but their very nature is different from these reifications since they tell us more than what any product would tell about its producer—stories tell a lot about the ‘hero’ who is in the center of any story.

As understood by the Greeks, action is not to be judged according to moral standards as if it were a mere behavior; rather, “action can be judged only by the criterion of greatness because it is in its nature to break through the commonly accepted and reach into the extraordinary.”<sup>93</sup> Human behavior can be judged by considering motives and

aims and hence it does not reveal anything that is unique to the individual since most motives and aims are to a large extent typical. Action, on the other hand, can only be judged by its greatness which must lie neither in the motive nor the goal but in the performance itself. Arendt believes that this understanding is Aristotelian:

It is this insistence on the living deed and the spoken word as the greatest achievements of which human beings are capable that was conceptualized in Aristotle's notion of *energeia* ("actuality"), with which he designated all activities that do not pursue an end (are *ateleis*) and leave no work behind (no *par' autas erga*), but exhaust their full meaning in the performance itself. It is from the experience of this full actuality that the paradoxical "end in itself" derives its original meaning.<sup>94</sup>

This Arendtian emphasis on the performance aspect of action must not lead to the conclusion that action is nothing but a fleeting moment of glory. In fact, the activity of action is one that constitutes the public realm, which was discussed earlier: "action not only has the most intimate relationship to the public part of the world common to us all, but is the one activity which constitutes it."<sup>95</sup> The political public realm, as Arendt saw it, arises directly out of acting together. It is for the sake of action that the Athenians ascribed to the institution of the *polis* a "twofold function": First, the *polis* was supposed to multiply the occasion for everyone to distinguish himself. Second, since action, as we discussed earlier, is futile—in the sense that it produces no lasting products, the *polis* was supposed to make sure that any deed deserving fame should not be forgotten. The city assured the actor the reality of his action—that his perishable actions would not be forgotten.<sup>96</sup>

The public realm, as Arendt saw it, rises directly out of living together in the mode of togetherness, the sharing of words and deeds, and thus it precedes all formal constitutions of the public realm such as governments. Since the public realm depends on the collective activities of acting and speaking, what Arendt called *power*, then its disappearance is the result of the elimination of these activities. The notion of power is important to Arendt and must be distinguished from force, which always exist in isolation where one man exerts it against his fellow people through means of violence. Force, moreover, is the outstanding characteristic of tyranny and it contradicts the human

condition of plurality since it not only depends on the isolation of the tyrant from his subjects but also on the isolation of the subjects themselves from each other. Arendt believes that whenever men gather together their *power* is potentially there. Potential power, however, “is actualized only where word and deed have not parted company, where words are not empty and deeds not brutal, where words are not used to veil intentions but to disclose realities, and deeds are not used to violate and destroy but to establish relations and create new realities.”<sup>97</sup> Under the rule of tyranny, for instance, words and deeds lose their natural ‘directions’ and commonsensical missions: they cease to be directed to the world and other men in the sense that they hinder any chance of preserving present relationships or encouraging new relationships. But it is imperative to note that even under the rule of tyranny, Arendt believed that power exists—albeit potentially. That power exists is evident from the observation that with the breakdown or failure of human organizations, people remain together protecting their solidarity: “what keeps people together after the fleeting moment of action has passed (what we call today “organization”), and what, at the same time, they keep alive through remaining together is power.”<sup>98</sup> Power, Arendt believed, is that which keeps the public realm alive: “what first undermines and then kills political communities is loss of power and final impotence.”<sup>99</sup> Since ‘action’ is the central activity in the public realm, power, which is the manifestation of the collective sharing of words and deeds or men acting in the plural, must suffer from the frustrations inherent in action, namely its irreversibility and unpredictability.

Irreversibility, the first disability of action, is concerned with the past. The predicament of action, of being unable to undo what one has already done, can be redeemed only by the faculty of forgiving: “the possible redemption from the predicament of irreversibility—of being unable to undo what one has done...is the faculty of forgiving.”<sup>100</sup> The second predicament of action, its unpredictability, is concerned with the future: “the remedy for unpredictability, for the chaotic uncertainty of the future, is contained in the faculty to make and keep promises.”<sup>101</sup> The predicament of unpredictability has to do for the most part with our inability to foretell with certainty the consequences of any action—since this action will fall in an enormous web of unlimited point of views. Without the faculty of forgiving we would suffer as long as we live from

the consequences of our actions and without the faculty of making and keeping promises “we would never be able to keep our identities.”<sup>102</sup> Arendt believes that these two faculties depend on plurality “for no one can forgive himself and no one can feel bound by a promise made only to himself”;<sup>103</sup> therefore, the faculty of action does not need a higher faculty in order to redeem itself. As we seen earlier, these two faculties were not recognized by the Greeks as intrinsic potentialities of action. In fact, Arendt believes that Jesus of Nazareth “is the discoverer of forgiveness in the realm of human affairs”<sup>104</sup> and although he discovered it within a religious context, the role of forgiveness should not be confined to it; the role of promising, on the other hand, can be traced back “to the Roman legal system.”<sup>105</sup> It is because of these redemptions to the activity of action, which were not known to the Greek mind, that the Graecomania thesis in reading Arendt seems unjustified.

Arendt’s analysis of action, while presented as the political activity par excellence because it grows out of our capacities for freedom as in the notion of beginning, never failed to point out to the ambiguities and disabilities inherent in this activity. It is this ambiguity and uncertainty in action that led many philosophers throughout history to escape from the field of action and so to substitute making for acting, to replace the unpredictable plurality with one-man-rule or mon-archy which turns one man, isolated from all others, into a master who deals with human affairs as he deals with a fabricated object. Arendt believes that the larger part of the history of political philosophy was in fact an attempt to escape from the frailty and predicaments of human affairs or action:

Escape from the frailty of human affairs into the solidity of quiet and order has in fact so much to recommend it that the greater part of political philosophy since Plato could easily be interpreted as various attempts to find theoretical foundations and practical ways for an escape from politics altogether. The hallmark of all such escapes is the concept of rule, that is, the notion that men can lawfully and politically live together only when some are entitled to command and the others forced to obey<sup>106</sup>

The result of introducing the concept of rule to politics in the case of Plato, for example, was a division between those who know and do not act and those who act and do not know—knowing and acting became two different performances. If one is to introduce the

concept of rule to politics then he must sacrifice freedom, which was also considered to be one of the frustrations of action: “It is in accordance with the great tradition of western thought to think along these lines: to accuse freedom of luring man into necessity, to condemn action, the spontaneous beginning of something new, because its results fall into a predetermined net of relationships, invariably dragging the agent with them, who seems to forfeit his freedom the very moment he makes use of it.”<sup>107</sup> Arendt believes that the only way out of such a predicament is to abstain from acting altogether, which was found in the philosophies of Stoicism. The problem with these approaches that denounce freedom, because of the web of human affairs which entangles us to the extent that we appear more like sufferers than authors of our actions, is that they identify freedom with sovereignty: “If it were true that sovereignty and freedom are the same, then indeed no man could be free, because sovereignty, the ideal of uncompromising self-sufficiency and mastership, is contradictory to the very condition of plurality. No man can be sovereign because not one man, but men, inhabit the earth.”<sup>108</sup> In the final analysis, action, along with the freedom inherent in it, is shown to be compatible only with non-sovereignty.

It is important to notice that both redemptions of action, promising and forgiving, because of their relation to plurality and therefore politics, offer an alternative to the Platonic understanding of rulership. Platonic rulership which sought an absolute domination of the self-- so that the right rulership over others in a political community must be shaped after the relation between me and myself (man writ large)-- had no other option but to offer guiding ‘moral’ principles derived from the self in its isolation from others. Thus, Platonic rulership contradicted the human condition of plurality. Arendt believed that moral principles derived from the faculties of forgiving and promising “rest on experiences which nobody could ever have with himself, which, on the contrary, are entirely based on the presence of others.”<sup>109</sup> Political communities that rely on the ‘power’ of promising which take the form of contracts and treaties, unlike other bodies politic that rely on rule and sovereignty, leave the unpredictability of men untouched since it is the manifestation of their freedom. The very act of making and keeping a promise in a body politic implies an agreement on something--agreements which also imply free agents. Bodies politic that rely on contracts and treaties provide us with a *limited* stability with regard to the unknown future in the sense that they do not decide

everything concerning the individual; say his private life, education...etc. Other political communities that rely on sovereignty and rulership provide complete stability with regard to the future either of the individual or the body politic—something that usually take place in the form of ‘total domination.’ Such political communities, therefore, aim at eliminating the unpredictability of the individual by turning his ‘action’ into a ‘behavior.’ Bodies politic that rely on contracts, Arendt says:

Leave the unpredictability of human affairs and the unreliability of men as they are, using them merely as the medium, as it were, into which certain islands of unpredictability are erected. The moment promises lose their character as isolated islands of certainty in an ocean of uncertainty, that is, when this faculty is misused to cover the whole ground of the future and to map out a path secured in all directions, they lose their binding power and the whole enterprise becomes self-defeating<sup>110</sup>

This language reminds us of Arendt’s criticism of ideology which was discussed earlier; Arendt’s critique of ideologies in general was based on the fact that they derive the validity of politics from a sphere beyond the accidental nature of action, namely, the mind and its ability to provide ‘keys’ or ‘guides to history’. Arendt was always suspicious of any attempt that would turn the unknown future of any body politic into something predictable; she was convinced that any departure from the sphere of action is a clear detachment from commonsense and reality and this was the fate of ideologies. In the above quotation Arendt warned us from misusing the power of promising, which constitutes the foundation of any body politic that depends on agreements and treaties and therefore freedom, since such a misuse would eliminate the possibility of free action—which would lead eventually to a complete domination over the individuals.

### **5. Thinking: The Missing Subject of *The Human Condition*.**

In his exceptional essay on Arendt’s analysis of the activity of thinking, Richard J. Bernstein stated that it is a mistake to assume that Arendt’s concern with thinking occurred late in her career: “Now it is commonly believed that Arendt started thinking about thinking only late in her career. But the truth is that Arendt’s concern with thinking always exerted a powerful influence on the character of her own passionate thinking.”<sup>111</sup> I

agree that Arendt's concern with thinking can be traced back to her early works-- something which I have tried to prove. As we saw earlier, Arendt's concern with thinking was found in her dissertation on Rahel Varnhagen as well as her major works on the Jewish question.

In the above exposition of the basic argument of *The Human Condition*, I decided to avoid discussing the role thinking in the *vita activa*. However, it should be noted that this avoidance is Arendtian in essence; Arendt herself stated that the activity of thinking is out of the scope of her research, *The Human Condition*:

“What we are doing” is indeed the central theme of this book. It deals only with the most elementary articulations of the human condition, with those activities that traditionally...are within the range of every human being...For this and other reasons, *the highest and perhaps purest activity of which men are capable, the activity of thinking, is left out of these present considerations*(Emphasis added)<sup>112</sup>

Given Arendt's exclusion of the activity of thinking from her considerations in *The Human Condition*, matters became more complex when the whole project of describing the *vita activa* was characterized as an exercise of *thought*:

What I propose in the following is a reconsideration of the human condition from the vantage point of our newest experiences and our most recent fears. This, obviously, is a matter of *thought*, and thoughtlessness—the heedless recklessness or hopeless confusion or complacent repetition of “truths” which have become trivial and empty—seems to me among the outstanding characteristics of our time. What I propose, therefore, is very simple: it is nothing more than to *think* what we are doing(emphasis added)<sup>113</sup>

The activity of thinking, paradoxically enough, is a frequent theme in *The Human Condition*. Even though thinking was explicitly excluded from this work--something that might have led some commentators to resist the possibility of its existence in the first place--careful textual analysis shows clearly its central importance to the whole project. But before discussing the details of the argument, it should be noted that Arendt was hesitant to offer a complete account concerning the activity of thinking. Commenting on Arendt's analysis of the activity of thinking in *The Human Condition*, Richard J.

Bernstein states that “we should not forget that the entire book [*The Human Condition*] is framed by her critical references to thinking.”<sup>114</sup> Unfortunately, Bernstein did not explain to us how this is so. In the following remarks I will show how Arendt’s discussion of the *vita activa* is ‘framed’ by her critical remarks and analogies with thinking.

In Arendt’s discussion of the activity of labor, she pointed out to the similarity between the laborer of the hand and the laborer of the mind: both are involved in a laboring process.

The underlying tie between the laborer of the hand and the laborer of the head is again the laboring process, in one case performed by the head, in the other by some other part of the body. Thinking... which is presumably the activity of the head, though it is in some way like laboring—also a process which probably comes to an end only with life itself—is even less “productive” than labor<sup>115</sup>

As we might remember from our previous discussions of labor, one of the distinctive marks of this activity is its cyclical movement: labor is linked essentially to the survival and life of man and thus it makes him subject to the unending process of nature; the natural movement of life goes in a circle which dictates growth and decay to which all living beings are subject. Thinking, Arendt believes, is also subject to this natural cyclical movement; it is an unending process which comes to an end only with the end of life. While the activity of labor ‘produces’ no permanent trace, thinking produces nothing at all by itself. The reification of thoughts into solid objects requires something beyond the mere activity of thinking such as materials and skills.

Thinking was also present in Arendt’s discussion of the activity of work. We were told that the activity of work proceeds from an idea in the mind: “The reification which occurs in writing something down, painting an image...is of course related to the *thought* which preceded it, but what actually makes a thought a reality and fabricates things of thoughts is...workmanship(emphasis added).”<sup>116</sup> Thinking and working are two separate activities in which thinking precedes work. The moment one decides to disclose to the world the content of his thoughts, Arendt believes, he “must first of all *stop* thinking and remember his thoughts. Remembrance in this, as in all other cases, prepares the

intangible and the futile for their eventual materialization; it is the beginning of the work process(emphasis added).”<sup>117</sup>

It may be useful here to clarify the distinction that Arendt makes between thinking and cognition. Cognition according to Arendt “always pursues a definite aim, which can be set by practical considerations...but once this aim is reached, the cognitive process has come to an end.”<sup>118</sup> The cognitive process, like the process of work, has a beginning and an end. The end-product in terms of its usefulness is what matters for cognition. If this end-product turns out to be useless, then the whole cognitive process has failed-- like the product of work, the product of cognition can be tested for its usefulness. The field of knowledge that corresponds to the cognitive process is science. The activity of thinking, on the contrary, “has neither an end nor an aim outside itself, and it does not even produce results; not only the utilitarian philosophy of *homo faber* but also the men of action and the lovers of results in the sciences have never tired of pointing out how entirely “useless” thought is.”<sup>119</sup> To say that thinking has no beginning or end, as discussed earlier, is to expose the repetitive aspect of this activity which corresponds to life. Arendt believes that thinking is a fact of human existence and concludes with the end of the individual’s life. Although the activity of thinking is involved in the process of ‘work’, it is by no means restricted by it. Thinking by itself, on the other hand, when it tends to produce objects, and thus to manifest itself outside of the mind, its ‘products’ are always considered useless. What ‘thinking’ produces is called by Arendt ‘thought-object’, the best examples of which are philosophy and works of art. Now, both thinking and cognition must be distinguished from “brain power” which is mostly concerned with “logical reasoning which is manifest in such operations as deductions from axiomatic or self-evident statements, subsumption of particular occurrences under general rules, or the techniques of spinning out consistent chains conclusions.”<sup>120</sup> These mental processes are usually called intelligence and “can indeed be measured by intelligence tests as bodily strength can be measured by other devices.”<sup>121</sup>

The link between thought and *action* in *The Human Condition* has always been a matter of debate. In a lengthy argument throughout her book, Leah Bradshaw stated that “The bond between thought and action is something that Arendt was aware of, but

seemed to resist.”<sup>122</sup> Bradshaw’s understanding of Arendt’s appreciation of the role of thinking in the political realm is an interesting one since it pictures Arendt’s alleged reversal of thought in a dramatic way. Arendt was presented as someone who believed in an absolute primacy of action over thought in most of her works until 1963 when Arendt went to Jerusalem to report on the trial of Eichmann for the *New Yorker*. At the trial, facing the war criminal Adolf Eichmann, Arendt came to realize that thinking must take priority over action. Before discussing Bradshaw’s lengthy argument in detail, I will quote a good overall summary of her argument provided by Jennifer Ring:

Leah Bradshaw...suggests that when she was writing *The Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt believed in the complete primacy of action and was content with a view that maintained the utter separability of action from thought. In Bradshaw's scenario, Arendt later came to realize the interconnectedness of thinking and acting and tried to resolve the tension between them, only to overemphasize the importance of thought, once again divorced too completely from action. The tension between thinking and acting persisted, Bradshaw argues, until Arendt went to Jerusalem to report on the trial of Eichmann. At that time, she turned toward the primacy of mental life but never resolved the “tensions” between her later interest in thinking and her early preoccupation with action.<sup>123</sup>

Bradshaw’s reading of this Arendtian reversal of thought is related to the picture that she draws of Arendt’s alleged understanding of action as an *autonomous* activity distinguished by its separability from thinking. Action in *The Human Condition*, Bradshaw believes, depends above all on a community of actors and a public realm, hence its public reality, not the private interior life of the mind. For this and other reasons, according to Bradshaw, Arendt excluded thinking from *The Human Condition*:

She [Arendt] had excluded any considerations of the interior life from her early works on the grounds that this ‘life’ is *less real* than the appearances of speech and deed. In *The Human Condition*, for example, she wrote: “Compared with the reality which comes from being seen and heard, even the greatest forces of intimate life—the passions of the heart, the thoughts of the mind, the delights of the senses—lead an uncertain, shadowy kind of existence unless and until they are transformed, deprivatized and deindividualized, as it were, into a shape to fit them for public appearance”(Italic added)<sup>124</sup>

The claim that Arendt excluded thinking from *The Human Condition* and never came to realize its importance until her report on Eichmann is absurd, I believe, for the following

reasons. First, although Arendt did not devote an entire work to the activity of thinking, it is unreasonable to claim that she did not provide us with a basic account of the function of this activity in relation to action. As this dissertation tries to prove, Arendt's concern with thinking can be traced back to her earlier works on Rahel Varnhagen and her writings on the Jewish question, which were discussed in the first as well as the present chapter. Second, it is not true that Arendt had excluded the activity of thinking from her considerations of the *vita activa*, or the activity of 'action' in particular, the political activity par excellence according to the account of *The Human Condition*. Reading Arendt's statements in the introduction to the latter work literally indicates explicitly her neglect of the topic and is apt to be misleading. But that Arendt herself discussed the role of thinking in the same book with regard to the *vita activa* is a fact. I will provide an account of Arendt's understanding of the relation between thought and action in subsequent remarks. Third, Bradshaw's claim that Arendt had excluded thinking from the discussion of the *vita activa*, because it is *less real* if compared with the reality of everything being seen and heard, does not hold up under careful examination. Textual analysis reveals that Arendt's claim, which was quoted by Bradshaw earlier and taken as the grounds for Arendt's dismissal of thinking from her consideration of the *vita activa*: "Compared with the reality which comes from being seen and heard, even the greatest forces of intimate life—the passions of the heart, the thoughts of the mind, the delights of the senses—lead an uncertain, shadowy kind of existence unless and until they are transformed, deprivatized and deindividualized, as it were, into a shape to fit them for public appearance", is taken out of context. Arendt was simply comparing two modes of existence, the private and the public. From the viewpoint of the public world, compared with the reality of everything being heard and seen by everyone, thinking as well as passions like love must be considered less real or not real at all unless they were transformed into something that can be seen and heard. In themselves, or from the viewpoint of the private, thinking and passions are undeniably real. Thinking, as we shall see in the following account, "needs neither to be seen nor heard nor used nor consumed in order to be real." Arendt's style of writing is dialectical and describing a concept from different viewpoints is a frequent practice of her.

The relation between thinking and acting in *The Human Condition* has escaped most commentators on the subject for obvious reasons: Arendt's distinction between the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa*, her explicit disregard for thinking in this work...etc. I believe that it is difficult to read Arendt's account of action without presupposing some kind of mental activity in the background. In other words, Arendt cannot speak of action as if it were thoughtless--this is a controversial claim that cannot be made and if she decided to make such a claim then she would have spent sometime defending it. However, it is a fact that Arendt *never* believed in thoughtless action and so she did not feel the need to justify such a claim. Instead, Arendt started her account of action with a commonsensical idea: action and speech are nothing but manifestations of the interior private activity called thinking:

Acting and speaking are still outward manifestations of human life, which knows only one activity that, though related to the exterior world in many ways, *is not necessarily manifest in it and needs neither to be seen nor heard nor used nor consumed in order to be real: the activity of thought* (emphasis added)<sup>125</sup>

Not only thinking is real but also its 'products'. In Arendt's discussion of the character of the 'products' of action and speech, she noted their lack of tangibility and durability. Although they are intangible and less durable, Arendt did not hesitate to assert that they "constitute the fabric of human relationships and affairs."<sup>126</sup> The reality of action and speech, Arendt believes, does not depend on its tangibility: the 'web of human affairs' which is the immediate result or 'product' of collective disclosure in the mode of acting and speaking is *intangible* but still undeniably real: "to deny...that this disclosure is *real* and has consequences of its own is simply unrealistic (emphasis added)."<sup>127</sup> Acting and speaking, Arendt stresses time and again, are nothing but manifestations of the interior private activity of thinking; acting and speaking do not correspond to any activity whatsoever but to thought. It is for this reason that I believe any approach of understanding Arendt's famous theory of action without presupposing thinking is doomed to failure. The meaningfulness of action and speech-- although dependent upon plurality, which *guarantees* the existence of action and speech, and the 'web' of human affairs, that provides the *context* in which any action takes place--is derived from this sphere called "thinking". The fallacy that Arendt excluded the activity of thinking from

her consideration of the *vita activa* makes the concept of action an ambiguous enterprise deprived of *meaning*.

It is true that Arendt does not say much about the relation between action and speech on one hand and thinking on the other at least at this stage of her work, *The Human Condition*. However, her basic claim in this work that both action and speech are manifestations of the interior activity of thinking may illuminate her earlier remarks about thinking. In her article 'Philosophy and Politics,' Arendt suggested that thinking is a 'dialogue' that takes place internally between me-and-myself and such characterization of thinking became the theme of her later writings on the subject. This dialogue is internal, i.e., in the mind, and the only difference between this dialogue and others is that it is silent while others are spoken and heard by everyone. According to Arendt, the hidden process through which we make up our minds, following Socrates, is called 'discourse.' Opinions, on the other hand, are the observable end of this process. It should be noted, however, that this analysis ascribes the same character to both thought and speech: thinking is an internal 'dialogue' which the mind carries out by itself through different opinions and the end of the process itself is also an opinion although it is spoken this time. As we shall see in the last chapter, the thoughts or opinions re-presented in this dialogue through the faculty of imagination are related to the outside world in the twofold sense: first, they spring from the confrontation one has with the world itself and, second, they are the result of other views about the world communicated to us through the medium of speech. Thus, thinking as an internal dialogue represents to itself its own *doxa* about the world thanks to our senses as well as other *doxai* communicated to us through speech. Speech has a strong relation to thinking in that it is the medium through which ideas and views about the world are communicated either internally or among a plurality of individuals. The communication of these opinions is also of central importance to the formation of our *own* opinions in the sense that we occasionally need other opinions in order to test the validity of our own.

Although Arendt's final account of thinking will be dealt with in the next chapter, her scattered remarks on this activity in her earlier works may enable us to see the relation between thinking and action. Thinking, Arendt believes, is an activity that is not restricted to any specific object: "Thinking as an activity can arise out of every

occurrence; it is present when I, having watched an incident in the street or having become implicated in some occurrence, now start considering what has happened, telling it to myself as a kind of story, preparing it in this way for its subsequent communication to others, and so forth.”<sup>128</sup> Arendt believes that thinking has an intrinsic relation to the outside world in the sense that living experiences are the grounds from which our thoughts arise. The faculty of thinking appears to us as a form of cognition, as a need to understand what is ‘no longer,’ which is in her terminology any incident that took place in the past whether we implied in it or not, as well as the present. The goal is to reconcile the past, which could not be undone, to the present that exists regardless of our admission of it or suffering from it. Action has a tangible character—it is something that takes place in the world of appearances and its reality is conditioned by such appearance. The fact that action is seen and heard by everyone makes it a good candidate for internalization. Both action and speech can be internalized and become the ‘ingredients’ of this silent dialogue between me-and-myself, which is called thinking.

One should remember that thinking for Arendt is not a process of contemplating some objects beyond history. Indeed, she reserved her strong criticism for those who confused thinking with contemplation of ideals or transcendent standards. As we shall see in the third chapter, she sides with the Socratic model of thinking as an internal dialogue. The Socratic internal dialogue of two-in-one is a form of thinking that accompanies our actions and in some cases guides it. Socrates, as we saw earlier, believed that we find ourselves prohibited from committing murder, for example, because we do not want to live in the company of a murderer. This Socratic insight ascribed to our thoughts the character of witnessing our actions and guiding them. This Socratic way of thinking, which does not appeal to any transcendent standards, as we shall see is characterized as ‘an insight of experience.’

Fourth, we all know that by emphasizing the role of action in her theory, Arendt attempted to find a remedy for the impasse in political theory which, she thinks, is influenced by Plato’s legacy. The problem with Platonic political philosophy was its introduction of the concept of rulership which ultimately sought a permanent stability in the political realm. The introduction of the latter concept into the political realm had many consequences that I articulated earlier; one of these important consequences

concerns the notion that men can lawfully and politically live together only when some are entitled to rule and the others forced to obey. Arendt turned against this concept of rulership because it rests ultimately on suspicion of action. But apart from this suspicion of action, Arendt advanced a genuine criticism, which revealed her thoughts about the role of thinking in the activity of action, against the Platonic notion of rulership. She believed that by introducing this notion, Plato made a division between “those who know and do not act and those who act and do not know... so that *knowing* what to do and *doing* it became two altogether different performances.”<sup>128</sup> Action, as stated clearly in her criticism of Plato, presupposes thinking. Arendt thought that there should be no separation between thinking and acting--in the end I am the same person who thinks and then acts either through making judgments or by doing. Now, if, according to Bradshaw, thinking was something that Arendt resisted in her analysis of action, how could she criticize Plato on the grounds that he deprived some people from the activity of thinking?

According to Bradshaw’s scenario, which ultimately leaves ‘action’ without any moral foundations due to its lack of thinking, Arendt underwent a reversal of thought by witnessing the trial of Adolf Eichmann:

Arendt condemned Eichmann for his acts, but what bothered her was his ‘thoughtlessness.’ This lack of thought appeared to her to have something to do with his inability to recognize that he had committed criminal acts. Arendt thereby inferred that the capacity for thought was prerequisite for the exercise of political judgment, and perhaps for recognizing justice. Not community, not ‘public space,’ but the interior, private activity of reflective thought is necessary for freedom. Finally, Arendt was compelled to admit that the capacity for meaningful thought is not dependent upon shared meaning for its existence<sup>129</sup>

I will examine this alleged reversal of thought in the following section which provides a summary of Arendt’s views on the trial.

### **Eichmann’s Thoughtlessness**

Adolf Eichmann was born in 1906. He did not show interest in school and eventually his scholastic achievements were a failure. Unsuccessful in finding a good job, he decided to join the Nazi party. As a Nazi lieutenant colonel he was accused of

organizing the Jewish emigration from Germany, and after the “Final Solution” was ordered by Hitler, his main occupation was the transportation of Jews to the gas chambers. After the war Eichmann tried to escape and disappear in Argentina where he was later kidnapped by Israeli secret agents. Eichmann was brought to Jerusalem in 1960 in order to be put on trial before Israeli judges. The trial began in April 1961 and ended with Eichmann being sentenced to death. He was executed in May 1962. As soon as Arendt heard of the trial she asked to report it for *The New Yorker*. Her articles in *The New Yorker*, were later turned into a book published in 1963. Generally speaking, the book deals with three, closely connected, major topics: First, the trial itself in which Arendt discusses the legality of the trial. Second, the Jewish role in the crimes against humanity, the holocaust. Third, the ‘criminal’ Eichmann and his character as a *person*. I do not intend to provide a comprehensive account of these three topics since they deal for the most with historical issues. Moreover, these issues were subject of enormous controversies that might offend some people given the history of the holocaust and the sensitivity of the survivors. However, since the goal of discussing the Eichmann controversy in the present dissertation is an exclusive study of Arendt’s notion of political thinking or the activity of thinking in general, I will touch upon these issues as far as they bear some relation to it.

As Jennifer Ring notes, “From its inception...the Eichmann trial was an intensely political event.”<sup>130</sup> There were so many complex issues related to the trial: first, the illegality of the kidnapping “which undermined the moral credibility of Israel as representative of all Jewish victims, and threatened to set a dangerous international legal precedent.”<sup>131</sup> Israel had violated what Arendt called the “territorial principle”, “whose significance lies in the fact that the earth is inhabited by many people and that these peoples are ruled by many different laws, so that every extension of one territory’s law beyond the borders and limitations of its validity will bring it into immediate conflict with the law of another territory.”<sup>132</sup> The political significance of this principle is overwhelming: many civilized countries seem to ignore it in various ways, for example, controlling the resources of another country or waging war for the purpose of granting freedom for those who lack it...etc. Apart from this political significance, which I leave undeveloped in the present context, we should be reminded that this “territorial principle”

echoes one of Arendt's basic claims in *The Human Condition*: the web of human affairs. The web of human affairs, as we have seen, is the result of man's interest in the world through words and deeds; it is something that arises spontaneously whenever men exist together in the mode of togetherness. Arendt also suggested that this web varies with for each group of people. Traditions or cultures, which undeniably include laws even in their primitive forms of being mere social restrains, are the immediate result of human togetherness. Compelling any country to accept the web of human affairs of another is not acceptable not only because it is process that might lead to a conflict between two people, but also because it is a manifestation of denying someone's freedom to choose who he is. Eichmann's trial was criticized by Arendt on these grounds. Although he is a war criminal and must appear before justice, the very act of bringing him to justice must not violate this primary understanding of justice. In Arendt's words, "a clear violation of international law had been committed in order to bring him to justice."<sup>133</sup> Discussing the consequences that precedence of this violation sets, Arendt asks sarcastically, "What are we going to say if tomorrow it occurs to some African state to send its agents into Mississippi and to kidnap one of the leaders of the segregationist movement there? And what are we going to reply if a court in Ghana or the Congo quotes the Eichmann case as a precedent?"<sup>134</sup> However, Arendt tends to overlook these questions and to focus on the demand for justice. For practical reasons, such as Argentina's reprehensible record of extraditing Nazi criminals and the failure of the German government to pressure Argentina, there seemed to be no other option but kidnapping on the condition that such practice must not be considered a precedent-setting act.

With regard to the Jewish role in the holocaust according to *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, Seyla Benhabib notes:

Of all the thorny historical and moral issues touched upon by Hannah Arendt, her evaluation of the behavior of the Jewish Councils remains the most difficult. It was also her passing judgment on these events and the individuals involved in them which earned her wrath, rejection, and condemnation of the established Jewish community<sup>135</sup>

Because of this topic, Arendt was called every name in the book: she was accused of being "anti-Semitic," "self-hating Jew," and above all "anti-Zionist." According to her biographer, "hostility surrounded her [Arendt] wherever she wen."<sup>136</sup> The controversy

over the role of the ‘Jewish councils’, which were originally formed by the Nazis to manage Jewish population, had violated a taboo that most intellectuals in the west know of. The part of the book that caused this controversy discusses some ‘categories’ proposed by the Nazis which, Arendt claims, “had been accepted without protest by German Jewry from the very beginning—German Jews as against Polish Jews, war veterans and decorated Jews as against ordinary Jews, families whose ancestors were German-born as against recently naturalized citizens, etc.—had been the beginning of the moral collapse of respectable Jewish society.”<sup>137</sup> Arendt pointed out to the fact that a Jew in the end, in the eyes of the Nazis, is nothing but a Jew, but she also notes that these categories played a practical role through the end of the war. Arendt tried to prove her case by discussing the role of some Jewish leaders such as Kastner, who was the vice-president of the Zionist organization in Budapest. Once again, Arendt finds herself in conflict with the Zionists:

Kastner was proud of his success in saving “prominent Jews,” ...as though in his view, too, it went without saying that a famous Jew had more right to stay alive than an ordinary one; to take upon himself such “responsibilities”—to help the Nazis in their effort to pick out “famous” people from the anonymous mass, for this and what it amounted to—“required more courage than to face death.” But if the Jewish and gentile pleaders of “special cases” were unaware of their involuntary complicity, this implicit recognition of the rule, which spelled death for all non-special cases, must have been very obvious to those who were engaged in the business of murder. They must have felt, at least, that by being asked to make exceptions, and by occasionally granting them, and thus earning gratitude, they had convinced their opponents of the lawfulness of what they were doing.<sup>138</sup>

That such statements might cause the negative reaction she received from the Jewish community is undoubtedly understandable—as the Anti Defamation League called her work “an evil book”. In the final analysis, Arendt suggests that without such collaboration many lives could have been saved and she does not fail to emphasize that Jewish collaboration is true:

The whole truth was that there existed Jewish community organizations... Wherever Jews lived, there were recognized Jewish leaders, and this leadership, almost without exception, cooperated in one way or another... with the Nazis. The whole truth was that if

the Jewish people had really been unorganized and leaderless, there would have been chaos...but the total number of victims would hardly have been between four and a half and six million people.<sup>139</sup>

Although I firmly believe that such detailed discussion must be left to historians of the holocaust, it is important that one must not miss the main point of Arendt's analysis of the subject. Hans Mommsen argues that Arendt's violation of the taboo, the holocaust and the role of Jewish counsels, must be considered within the context of her views on totalitarianism: "It is...important to be aware of the fact that Arendt raised this issue [collaboration] not so much because of her repeated disputes with representatives of the Zionist camp, but because of her earlier observation, that under totalitarian conditions, the victims were deprived of their capability to resist or to flee from the terror and were turned into immobilized and apathetic human beings."<sup>140</sup> It is the effect of totalitarianism and not "the intention to raise moral objections against the victims and survivors alike" that "induced her to focus on the controversial reaction of the Jewish communities against the Nazi onslaught."<sup>141</sup> If pushed to its logical conclusions, Mommsen's reading implies that Arendt's understanding of the effects of totalitarianism, which deprive men "of their capability to resist or to flee from the terror," makes it practically impossible to question the collaboration of Jewish counsels with the Nazis.

Part of Mommsen's story is correct: Arendt herself stated in her Eichmann report that she discussed the subject of collaboration "because it offers the most striking insight into the totality of the moral collapse the Nazis caused in respectable European society."<sup>142</sup> However, Mommsen failed to see that such effects of totalitarianism do not exempt the Jewish counsels from their responsibilities. According to Arendt's picture, German Jewry, as we saw earlier, had accepted many classifications or "categories" that were introduced by the Nazis "without protest"--acceptance which was described by Arendt as "the beginning of the moral collapse of respectable Jewish society." This acceptance in itself must not be understood as an automatic passive reaction to totalitarian power. Actually, Arendt was clear in her rejection of this idea: "In view of the fact that today such matters are often treated as though there existed a law of human nature compelling everybody to lose his dignity in the face of disaster, we may recall the attitude of the French Jewish war veterans who were offered the same privileges by their

government, and replied: “We solemnly declare that we renounce any exceptional benefits we may derive from our status as ex-servicemen.”<sup>143</sup> According to Arendt, there was always a moment of refusal to cooperate with the Nazis, at least at the first stages of the Nazi campaign, as her example of the French men shows. Resistance to the Nazis, Arendt admits, existed although with limited or no success at all. In an interview (found recently in her posthumous papers but not published yet) with Samuel Grafton for *Look* magazine, Arendt answered Grafton’s question about the moment when Jewish leaders should have urged “cooperate no longer, but fight”:

There never was a moment when “the community leaders [could] have said: ‘cooperate no longer, but fight!’” as you phrase it. Resistance, which existed but played a very small role, meant only: we don’t want that kind of death, we want to die with honor. But the question of cooperation is indeed bothersome. *There certainly was a moment when the Jewish leaders could have said: We shall no longer cooperate, we shall try to disappear. This moment might have come when they, already fully informed of what deportation meant, were asked to prepare the lists for the Nazis for deportation.* The Nazis themselves gave them the numbers and the categories of those who are to be shipped to the killing centers, but who then went and who was given a chance to survive was decided by the Jewish authorities. In other words, those who cooperated were at that particular moment masters over life and death. Can’t you imagine what that meant in practice? Take the example of Theresienstadt where every detail of daily life was in the hands of the Jewish Elders, and think what would happen to an inmate if he ever dared to question the “wisdom” of any decision taken by these Elders (Italic added).<sup>144</sup>

Arendt’s point is better understood by distinguishing between two levels: the first level is that in which the Jewish leaders accepted the privileges bestowed upon them by the Nazis. Arendt was clear in her objection to such acceptance since it provoked divisions among Jews--something that alarmed her to “the beginning of the moral collapse of respectable Jewish society.” Not all Jewish communities, however, had accepted such privileges. The second level is that in which Nazism had uncovered its true face as a killing instrument through the so-called final solution. At this second stage as Arendt in the above interview notes, resistance, which existed but with limited effect, was in some cases nearly impossible. However, this impossibility of resistance must not be understood as the sole alternative to cooperation—an option adopted by the Jewish counsels. In other

words, if the Jewish councils did not choose to resist then that does not necessarily mean that they would cooperate. Arendt's analysis seems to suggest that because of practical considerations, such as picking people to die over others...etc, the alternative of cooperation became morally repugnant and so it must have been understood as such by those who were engaged in it. Now, if resistance was nearly impossible and cooperation was immoral, then this will leave the Jewish councils with one kind of 'passive' resistance, namely, abstaining from wrong doing. I think that this is what Arendt was getting at in her phrase, "there certainly was a moment when the Jewish leaders could have said: We shall no longer cooperate, we shall try to disappear." After discovering what deportation meant, Arendt expected the Jewish councils to act in accordance with their *understanding*. Moments of such understanding, Arendt suggests, take place in practice even in the face of disasters. There is no such "law of human nature compelling everybody to lose his dignity in the face of disaster." This basic understanding did not need a highly intelligent mind in order to arrive at a conception of morality.

Arendt strongly objected to this Jewish collaboration with the Nazis and she moved on to discuss the other side of the story, the justification for collaboration. In the same interview with Grafton, Arendt discussed these justifications as they appeared in the Kastner report: "a) if some of us have to die, it is better we decide it than the Nazis", Arendt immediately replied to this justification by stating: "I disagree. It would have been infinitely better to let the Nazis do their own murderous business."<sup>145</sup> The second justification for collaboration: "b) With a hundred victims we shall save a thousand." Arendt replied sarcastically to this justification by stating that it is "like the last version of human sacrifice. Pick seven virgins, sacrifice them to placate the wrath of the gods. Well, this is not my religious belief, and most certainly is not the faith of Judaism."<sup>146</sup>

The last part of our exposition of *Eichmann in Jerusalem* concerns Arendt's analysis of Eichmann's personality. This part of Arendt's book was also a subject to controversy mainly due to her infamous concept, the "banality of evil." It is important to note that Arendt did not intend to provide any theory about crimes or the character of criminals by using this concept; she was merely trying to come to an understanding of Eichmann as a natural product of modern mass society and that his crimes can only be understood within this framework. Although Arendt did not intend to establish any theory

about the nature of crimes in general, her analysis of this subject was taken seriously by researchers in different fields other than philosophy. Paul Leighton, writing about the character of Islamic terrorists, does not hesitate to use and quote Arendt's understanding of Eichmann's character as a reliable way of understanding the terrorist's character:

When attempting to make sense of the character of terrorists, the proper context is research showing that 'normal' people participate in executions, lynch mobs, military massacres, and genocide. For example, a key figure in the Nazi extermination of Jews was Adolph Eichmann, who was examined by six psychiatrists who proclaimed him 'normal.' More normal, at any rate, than I am after having examined him,' one of them is said to have exclaimed, while another found Eichmann's whole psychological outlook, his attitude towards his wife and children, mother and father, brothers, sisters, and friends, was 'not only normal but most desirable.'<sup>147</sup>

Eichmann, as Arendt describes him, is not a man "obsessed with a dangerous and insatiable urge to kill...Worse, his was obviously also no case of insane hatred to Jews, of fanatical anti-Semitism."<sup>148</sup> After the second chapter of the book, which deals with biographical information about Eichmann, the third chapter was given the title, 'An Expert on the Jewish Question.' Eichmann claimed repeatedly that he harbored no hatred towards Jews whatsoever although no one believed him. In his attempt of pushing this offense away from him, he told the judges during trial about his expertise on the Jewish question; he told them about his reading of Herzl's *Der Judenstaat*, which, he says, converted him promptly and forever to Zionism! He told the police that after reading this book he always thought of a "political solution" to the Jewish question as distinguished from the "physical solution." The first meant driving Jews out of Europe while the other meant killing them. Eichmann began to spread this idea among his friends and went on to learn Hebrew and to study the setup of the Zionist organization. Such knowledge enabled him to be the official spy on the Zionist organization. According to Eichmann, he never doubted his liking of the Zionist leaders and the reason, he explains, is that they are "idealists" like him. Arendt notes that the word "idealist" for Eichmann meant not someone who believes in an idea or someone who does not steal or accept bribes, but "a man who *lived* for his idea...and who was prepared to sacrifice for his idea everything and, especially, everybody."<sup>149</sup> Eichmann liked "idealists" such as Kastner, "with whom he negotiated during the Jewish deportations from Hungary and with whom he came to

an agreement that he, Eichmann, would permit the “illegal” departure of a few thousand Jews to Palestine...in exchange for “quiet and order” in the camps from which hundreds of thousands were shipped to Auschwitz. The few thousands saved by the agreement, prominent Jews and members of the Zionist youth organization, were, in Eichmann’s words, “the best biological material”.<sup>150</sup>

The cooperation between the Nazis and Zionist leaders is something that Arendt pointed to whenever it was relevant to her discussion. Even when Eichmann chose not to talk about this subject on some occasions in the trial Arendt reminded her readers of it. The main point of this discussion was that both aims of the the Zionists and the Nazis happen to coincide: “The Jews ‘desired’ to migrate, and he, Eichmann, was there to help them, because it so happened that at the same time the Nazi authorities had expressed a desire to see their Reich Judenrein. The two desires coincided, and he, Eichmann, could ‘do justice to both parties’.”<sup>151</sup> During the trial, however, Eichmann chose not to speak of this identification of goals, but “he agreed that today, when “times have changed too much,” the Jews might not be too happy to recall this “pulling together” and he did not want “to hurt their feelings”.<sup>152</sup> During cross examination, however, he told the judge that he “regarded the Jews as opponents with respect to whom a mutually...fair solution had to be found...That solution I [Eichmann] envisaged as putting soil under their feet so that they would have a place of their own, soil of their own. I cooperated in reaching such a solution...because it was also the kind of solution that was approved by movements among the Jewish people themselves.”<sup>153</sup>

Eichmann’s expertise on the Jewish question was not his only interesting quality; Arendt also noticed another important feature of his, “thoughtlessness”—which is connected more or less with her concept of the banality of evil. The judges told Eichmann on several occasions that all he said was “empty talk” and that he was trying to cover up his other thoughts. Arendt, although in agreement with the judges on this emptiness, thought that this “emptiness” is not ‘feigned.’ According to Arendt’s story, Eichmann told the judge on one occasion, when the latter was unable to understand him, “officialese [Amtssprache] is my only language.”<sup>154</sup> Arendt insists that Eichmann’s statement is not a mere expression occasioned by the pressure of the moment; rather, she believes that officialese became his language “because he was genuinely incapable of uttering a single

sentence that was not a cliché.”<sup>155</sup> That Eichmann was trying to cover up some hideous thoughts by the use of these clichés, the supposition of the judges, Arendt believes, “seems refuted by the striking consistency with which Eichmann, despite his rather bad memory, repeated word for word the same stock phrases and self-invented clichés...each time he referred to an incident or event of importance to him.”<sup>156</sup>

Eichmann’s thinking seemed to be limited to everything that bears a relation to his job: when he was being interrogated for eight months by a Jewish officer, he “did not have the slightest hesitation in explaining to him at considerable length, and repeatedly, why he had been unable to attain a higher grade in the S.S, that this was not his fault.”<sup>157</sup> When Eichmann was asked about the Wannsee Conference which dealt with various methods of killing, his answers “of course”, Arendt states, “was that Eichmann remembered the turning points in his own career rather well, but that they did not necessarily coincide with the turning points in the story of Jewish extermination or, as a matter of fact, with the turning points in history.”<sup>158</sup> The point of the matter is that in almost each answer given by Eichmann, one might find a cliché that would refer to each period of his life. According to Arendt “he remembered none of the facts that might have supported, however faintly, his incredible story,” (Arendt refers to witnesses such as those organizing the illegal immigration to Palestine who could have been used as supporters of his story)<sup>159</sup>. Thus, Eichmann’s memory, Arendt concludes, “functioned only in respect to things that had a direct bearing upon his career,”<sup>160</sup> and so he failed to see reality as it manifests itself to different point of views.

Eichmann’s inability to utter a single word that was not a cliché, Arendt explains, is connected to his inability to think independently: “The longer one listened to him, the more obvious it became that his inability to speak was closely connected with his inability to *think*, namely, to think from the standpoint of somebody else.”<sup>161</sup> The connection between thinking and speaking is a topic that Arendt treated earlier in *The Human Condition*; we were told that acting and speaking are manifestations of the interior private activity of thinking. Communication between equals in the public realm, she suggested, is necessary for the formation of our own thinking. But we also know from her essay, ‘Philosophy and Politics’, that the inner dialogue between me-and-myself is essential and perhaps the most important activity for the faculty of judgment, the

faculty that allows us to tell right from wrong. The activity of thinking in the mode of two-in-one, as we have seen, does justice to plurality in the sense that the opinions and judgments of others are re-presented in this inner dialogue so that an individual can test the validity of his judgment by submitting it among other challenging judgments. The dilemma of Eichmann's thinking was that he used these clichés, which are also thoughts, not only to think *through* them but also to use them as a *guard* against the reality of the outside world and other views about the world. This is the reason why it was hard to communicate with him. Communication with Eichmann was almost impossible, Arendt claims, "not because he lied, but because he was surrounded by the most reliable of all safe guards against the words and the presence of others, and hence against reality as such."<sup>162</sup> In a sense, he used his thoughts in the way Rahel Varnhagen did, he used them to shelter him from every idea that might irritate his mind. Like Rahel Varnhagen, his thoughts functioned as an escape-mechanism; a process that shielded him from reality. If Eichmann was able to falsify reality by simply ignoring it, then he could be comfortable carrying out the final solution without listening to the annoying voice of his conscience. As we shall see later, Eichmann, when charged with carrying out the final solution, consoled himself with the *thought* that he no longer "was the master of his own deeds."

This habit of taking refuge in clichés made it hard for the judges, the prosecutors and the reporters to understand what he said. The problem facing everyone attempting to understand this man, according to Arendt was to find a "way out of the dilemma between the unspeakable horror of the deeds and the undeniable ludicrousness of the man who penetrated them."<sup>163</sup> Although prosecutors made every effort to establish that Eichmann was a man with vicious character, Arendt stated, "everybody could see that this man was not a "monster," but it was difficult indeed not to suspect that he was a clown."<sup>164</sup> This Arendtian description of Eichmann's character, that he was in fact nothing more than a clown, never found its way to the public during the time of the trial because it "would have been fatal to the whole enterprise, and was also rather hard to sustain in view of the sufferings he and his like had caused to millions of people."<sup>165</sup> Arendt's assessment of Eichmann's actions and words revealed to her that he is nothing but a simple-minded man who participated in the killing of millions. When confronted with this brutal fact, he showed no remorse; he, strangely enough, regretted not advancing in his career. This was

the embodiment of what Arendt called in her subtitle of the book, the banality of evil. Arendt did not intend to say that what Eichmann did was banal, as Seyla Benhabib rightly remarks, “The phrase the “banality of evil” was meant to refer to a specific quality of mind and character of the doer himself, but neither to the deeds nor to the principles behind those deeds.”<sup>166</sup> I think that by the use of this phrase, Arendt tried to undermine the belief that atrocious actions require atrocious characters, which was dominant in most theories about evil. Eichmann was a simple man working his way up in the bureaucratic system and was not driven by any genuine hatred towards Jews—he was simply doing his “job.” Eichmann himself stated repeatedly that he was nothing but a law-abiding citizen: “he not only obeyed *orders*, he also obeyed the *law*.”<sup>167</sup> The Fuhrer’s words as everyone knows about this period “had the force of law.”<sup>168</sup> The sudden change in Eichmann, according to his story, came when he was charged with executing the final solution; only then “he consoled himself with the thought that he no longer “was the master of his own deeds,” that he was unable “to change anything.”<sup>169</sup> As time and years went by, Arendt remarks, Eichmann “lost the need to feel anything at all.”<sup>170</sup>

Eichmann’s diligence in looking out for advancement in his job *in itself* is in no way criminal and cannot be counted as a brutal trait in his character although such diligence eventually contributed to the success of the Nazi atrocities; Arendt notices, Eichmann “certainly would never have murdered his superior in order to inherit his post. He *merely*, to put the matter colloquially, *never realized what he was doing*.”<sup>171</sup> Arendt characterized this inability to know what he was doing as a lack of “imagination” or “thoughtlessness”: “He was not stupid. It was sheer thoughtlessness—something by no means identical with stupidity—that predisposed him to become one of the greatest criminals of that period.”<sup>172</sup> Eichmann’s typicality, in so far as he was a man concerned with his job, and his non-demonic character allowed Arendt to speak of the “banality” of evil. In the final analysis, Eichmann is described as a man far removed from reality—a removal that was possible because of his thoughtlessness. In her postscript to the third edition of *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, Arendt says: “That such remoteness from reality and such thoughtlessness can wreak more havoc than all the evil instincts taken together which, perhaps, are inherent in man—that was, in fact, the lesson one could learn in

Jerusalem. But it was a lesson, neither an explanation of the phenomenon nor a theory about it.”<sup>173</sup>

As I promised earlier, we should look again at Bradshaw’s study of Arendt’s alleged reversal of thought which took place with her report on Eichmann’s trial. By way of summarizing Bradshaw’s argument, there are two important stages in Arendt’s intellectual development. The first can be characterized by the absence of the role of thinking; it is also concerned with the primacy of action as exemplified in *The Human Condition*; in the latter work, according to Bradshaw, Arendt resisted the idea of a bond between thought and action “The bond between thought and action is something that Arendt was aware of, but seemed to resist.” Arendt had resisted this idea, according to Bradshaw, because thinking seemed to be less real if compared with the reality of action and speech. As we saw earlier, this first stage of the argument is simply untrue since Arendt herself did not hesitate to point out to the importance of thinking as the principal activity behind action and speech. The second stage of Bradshaw’s argument is partially related to the first: Eichmann was found guilty, according to Arendt, because of his thoughtlessness. Now, given Arendt’s *neglect* of ‘thinking’ in her earlier works and its separation from action (which we proved wrong) and what she wrote on the topic of totalitarianism (which we will discuss shortly), it would be hard to establish Eichmann’s guilt. Arendt, therefore, must have changed her mind with her assessment of Eichmann since she accused him of ‘thoughtlessness’--something “for which her previous work had made no provision.”<sup>174</sup> The story about totalitarianism can be explained in the words of Bradshaw herself:

The lesson [Eichmann’s remoteness from reality and his thoughtlessness]...had a profound effect on Arendt’s own thinking. It is curious that she so adamantly defended Eichmann’s individual responsibility, given what she wrote on the subject of totalitarianism...If we were to extrapolate the latter and apply them to Eichmann’s case it would difficult indeed to establish his responsibility for his acts. Arendt had said that totalitarianism made it hard, if not impossible, for men living under its domination to think or act independently.<sup>175</sup>

According to Bradshaw, Arendt's neglect of any role for thinking in the *The Human condition* in addition to her claim of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* that under conditions of totalitarianism the ability to think is impaired, must have contradicted her present assertion that Eichmann, who lived and functioned under conditions of totalitarianism, was guilty because of his failure to *understand* and recognize the direction of the whole genocidal process. It is not a contradiction, however, if we view these contradictory claims in terms of a change of view. According to Bradshaw, Arendt changed her mind with this present claim about Eichmann:

Now, in 1963, Arendt expected Eichmann as a human being to be able to exercise these traditional capacities [of thought], even though he lived in a totalitarian 'world.' She did not accept that ignorance or insanity or passive obedience to political authority in a totalitarian state should even be considered as possible defenses of Eichmann's actions<sup>176</sup>

Arendt's idea that it is difficult to think independently under totalitarian rule must not be taken literally. It is true that totalitarianism turns the plurality of the public realm into a sphere shaped after the rulership of the household. It is also true that totalitarianism somehow impairs the activity for taking initiatives such as action and resistance. But to understand this Arendtian claim in a way that makes obedience a mechanical reaction to totalitarianism is more or less incomprehensible. As we saw earlier, Arendt was against treating "such matters as though there existed a law of human nature compelling everyone to lose his dignity in the face of disaster." One of the examples that Arendt used and became the cause of an enormous controversy was the issue of "collaboration." In *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, Arendt cited the French Jewish war veterans, who were offered the same privileges offered to the Germans but had the ability to refuse these privileges even though they lived under totalitarian rule.

In her article, 'Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship,' which was written a few years after the Eichmann trial, Arendt discussed some theories that suggests Eichmann was not liable for his actions. The first theory which the defense used was the cog-theory. According to this theory, Eichmann is nothing but a small cog in a huge machine and that if he did not do the job someone else would. Arendt agreed with the court not to consider this theory at all:

The judges did what was right and proper, they discarded the whole notion, and so, incidentally, did I, all blame and praise to the contrary notwithstanding. For, as the judges took great pains to point out explicitly, in a courtroom there is no system on trial, no history or historical trends, no isms, anti-Semitism for instance, but a person, and if the defendant happened to be a functionary, he stands accused precisely because even a functionary is still a human being, and it is in this capacity that he stands trial<sup>177</sup>

As Arendt rightly points out, small cogs are usually the ones who actually commit the big crimes. The cog-plea cannot help if the court is asking about *personal* responsibility. Eichmann's problem, if he decided to use the cog-plea, is that he wouldn't have an answer to the question: why did you continue to be a cog if you know that the whole function of this machine is immoral?

The second theory that Arendt treated in the same article is the one that would prove Eichmann's non-liability for his crimes based on his obedience to the law of the land. The problem with this theory is that it confuses obedience with consent. The first cannot be possible except in the case of a child or a slave where they would be helpless if they don't obey. Only a free adult can give his consent. Arendt's basic assumption was that "no man, however strong, can ever accomplish anything, good or bad, without the help of others."<sup>178</sup> Politically speaking, those who obey the leader are in fact supporting him: "Those who seem to obey him [the leader] actually support him and his enterprise; without such "obedience" he would be helpless, whereas in the nursery or under conditions of slavery—the two spheres in which the notion of obedience made sense and from which it was then transposed into political matters—it is the child or the slave who becomes helpless if he refuses to "cooperate"."<sup>179</sup> In the final analysis, even the obedience theory won't exonerate Eichmann of his guilt. Eichmann's obedience will be understood, even if he were a cog, in terms of his support to the system: "If I obey the laws of the land, I actually support its constitution, as becomes glaringly obvious in the case of revolutionists and rebels who disobey because they have withdrawn this tacit consent."<sup>180</sup>

That Arendt changed her view by emphasizing independent thinking in the face of totalitarian rule seems to be supported at first sight by Arendt's statements in *Eichmann*

*in Jerusalem* as well as her later essay, 'Personal Responsibility under Dictatorship.' Quoting Arendt's statement of *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, "What we have demanded in these trials, where the defendants had committed "legal" crimes, is that human beings be capable of telling right from wrong even when all they have to guide them is their own judgment, which, moreover, happens to be completely at odds with what they must regard as the unanimous opinion of all those around them,"<sup>181</sup> Bradshaw stated that "this view put her [Arendt] in a position of having to defend a transcendent conception of justice for which her previous work had made no provision."<sup>182</sup> Bradshaw concluded that Eichmann's actions could not be excused from Arendt's point of view "because we adhere to certain 'truths' or 'essences' that stand outside politics and are discoverable through thought alone."<sup>183</sup> I would admit the soundness of Bradshaw's argument if thinking independently, even in the face of totalitarianism, is something for which Arendt's previous work "had make no provision." In my final analysis, I would like to suggest an alternative interpretation with regard to this 'sudden' change of view which occurred to Arendt while reporting on Eichmann's trial: Arendt's remarks in her earlier works, I believe, will provide us with an insight into the continuation of her thought and that those earlier thoughts were the foundation of her judgment on Eichmann. I will begin with a consideration of some of Arendt's important remarks in *The Human Condition* as well as her explorations of the Jewish question--the subject that was completely neglected in Bradshaw's study.

To begin, I will discuss the concept of action. Arendt's analysis of the concept of action in *The Human Condition* seems to contradict most theories about moral judgment. While moral judgments are usually understood in terms of adhering to "moral standards" taking into account motives and intentions on one hand and goals and consequences on the other, action "can be judged only by the criterion of greatness because it is in its nature to break through the commonly accepted and reach into the extraordinary."<sup>184</sup> The greatness of action can also function as an example to be followed by others, an exemplary action. As we saw earlier, it was possible for Arendt to choose the alternative of the predictability of action or what is accomplished by it, but she realized that the price for such predictability is too high since it will either lead to conformity or blurring the value of self-disclosure. From hence she decided to emphasize and to focus on the role of

action as self-revealing activity. The art of politics, Arendt believes, teaches men how to bring forth such greatness and distinction. This analysis of action can be contrasted with what we understand by the notion of 'behavior.' The latter notion does not reveal any uniqueness since it is typical and common. This Arendtian approach to politics in terms of 'action' is obviously different from all other approaches influenced by natural sciences in which all actions are understood according to a rule or a set of rules. Unlike Arendt's understanding of it, these approaches render action as predictable behavior. What is important to us in this context is Arendt's confrontation with some incidents in history where action was transformed into a behavior, where uniqueness was distorted into conformity. While studying these historical examples Arendt insisted time and again that they blur the self-revelatory character of action.

The first incident of such conformity that we noticed in Arendt's intellectual development is the Jewish unanimity of opinion concerning the question of Palestine. Arendt believed that such unanimity of opinion occurs "under conditions of mass society or mass hysteria, where we see all people suddenly behave as though they were members of one family, each multiplying and prolonging the perspective of his neighbor."<sup>185</sup> As we saw in the first chapter, the unanimity of Jewish opinions concerning the establishment of a Jewish state and the Zionist ideology justified everything even the use of violence as the proper means of politics:

Unanimity of opinion is a very ominous phenomenon, and one characteristic of our modern mass age. It destroys social and personal life, which is based on the fact that we are different by nature and by conviction. To hold different opinions and to be aware that other people think differently on the same issue shields us from that godlike certainty which stops all discussion and reduces social relationships to those of an ant heap. A unanimous public opinion tends to eliminate bodily those who differ, for mass unanimity is not the result of an agreement, but an expression of fanaticism and hysteria. In contrast to agreement, unanimity does not stop at certain well defined objects, but spreads like an infection into every related issue<sup>186</sup>

What Arendt demanded in the face of such conformity or the sweeping submission to one *truth* is that one must attempt 'to stop and *think*'-- that one must reflect before making his judgment. Arendt expected the Jewish masses to reflect on the basic claims of Zionism and to consider the consequences of the Zionist project with regard to the native

inhabitant. However, the sweeping approval of everything the Zionists' said or did made it hard for ordinary Jews to evaluate the situation objectively. Criticizing this branch of the Zionists, called socialist Zionists, which followed blindly the propaganda and ideological policies of the Jewish agency, Arendt accuses them of 'thoughtlessness': "they did not even *stop to think* of the very existence of the Arabs (Italic added)."<sup>187</sup>

Both mass and totalitarian societies, although they are of different nature, render the same result with regard to the citizens: the conformity they produce in people obscure the freedom of the citizens to reveal their unique identities. Mass society transforms the individual into a mere 'cog.' In the words of Melvyn Hill, "Conformity in mass society...consists of thinking of oneself exclusively as a jobholder and consumer, playing a functional role in the economy, and looking forward to the rewards for one's contribution to it."<sup>188</sup> Under conditions of totalitarian rule, "people found themselves completely isolated from each other and reduced to depoliticized masses. They became incapable of political action, for the totalitarian regime now claimed the exclusive right to take initiatives since it had a monopoly on the legitimacy conferred by the new ideology."<sup>189</sup> An individual under totalitarian rule loses his value as an individual; he matters only insofar as he is an instantiation of shared group identity, say his race or his ethnic background. Arendt's criticism of both political structures is that they, either directly or indirectly, deprive men of their political rights and their capacity to initiate an action.

It is this quarrel with conformity-- as a result of mass hysteria, as in the case of Zionism, or as a result of totalitarianism or even mass society--that partly shaped Arendt's notion of action as the sole activity that reveals a unique individual. In fact, by introducing her concept of action, Arendt attempted to find an alternative to these modes of thinking which force the future as well as the individual into being a predictable entity. As we saw earlier, the activity of thinking in totalitarianism as well as ideology presents itself as an all-encompassing logic of totality; it provides an intellectual guarantee against an unpredictable future and reduces all actions to mere typical behavior. But Arendt, to be sure, never lost hope in action. Action, the only activity that reveals an unrepeatably free thinker, is characterized by Arendt specifically by its shining distinctness against a background marked by commonality and unanimity. Her work on Zionism and the

question of Palestine is a good example to illustrate her views: against the unanimity of Jewish opinion regarding Palestine, she presented her work as a *different* view of reality and she warned her fellow Jews of the dangers inherent in such an enterprise. Moreover, while living under a totalitarian rule, Arendt *acted* against the ‘laws’ of the regime<sup>190</sup> and when she left Germany she was a strong voice against the horrific nature of the Nazi party.

Arendt’s understanding of action as a unique form of practice that reveals a unique person can be connected with her view about the meaning of reality. In my earlier discussion of Arendt’s essay, ‘Philosophy and Politics,’ I paid some attention to Arendt’s phenomenological view of reality which she attributed to Socrates’ understanding of *doxa*. To him, *doxa* was the formulation of speech of what appears to me. The reality of the world, he thought, opens itself to many different views and consequently judgments or opinions. As he saw it, this *doxa* is not subjective fantasy since it is *about* an objective world, but it is also not something absolute and valid for all because we see the world from different locations. The validity of any *doxa* can be tested only when put forward against other *doxai* through the medium of speech. The introduction of truth, on the other hand, to the political realm was an ominous phenomenon for Arendt since it tends to unify all opinions and end all discussion and debate. What is important for us to note in this context is that this understanding of reality, which is partly dependent on plurality of individuals, was behind her notion of action. The uniqueness of action depends on two factors that take place during its correspondence with reality: first, the uniqueness of action depends on the distinctiveness of the actor himself, that is, the particular ‘location’ from which he perceives reality, for example, his education, his cultural background...etc.; second, the uniqueness of action depends on the particular way through which reality presents itself to a unique actor. Since we are humans and have limited perspectives we tend to view reality as ‘it appears to us,’ which is by no means its complete meaning. Given that we cannot comprehend the complete reality of anything without further effort agents must limit their judgments to that which ‘appears to them,’ that is, the particular way through which reality disclosed itself to them. Reality in this sense can function as the objective ground of our relative judgments. In some rare moments of history where togetherness is lost, say under totalitarianism or mass hysteria

where all opinions are either unified or isolated, it is the task of action to bring forth a different vision of reality and by doing so action helps in restoring the relation between people and their world. This different vision is nothing but a mode of self-disclosure; an action of someone who is unique in a distinct place in the world and hence the impossibility for his vision to be reduced to another.

Under conditions of totalitarianism Arendt admitted that it is difficult if not impossible to resist. But as I wrote earlier, resistance is not the sole alternative to collaboration. Arendt categorically refused all reasons for cooperation with the Nazis and, as we saw, this was the major issue that gave rise to the huge controversy around her work on Eichmann. In her important article, 'Personal Responsibility under Dictatorship', Arendt considered the motives and justifications of those who cooperated as well as those who did not. Of those who did not cooperate, she wrote:

The nonparticipants [in collaboration with the Nazis], called irresponsible by the majority, were the only ones *dared judge by themselves*, and they were capable of doing so not because they disposed of a better system of values or because the old standards of right and wrong were still firmly planted in their mind and conscience...the nonparticipants were those whose consciences did not function in this, as it were, automatic way—as though we dispose of a set of learned or innate rules which we then apply to the particular case as it arises ...Their criterion, I think, was a different one: they asked themselves to what extent they would still be able to live in peace with themselves after having committed certain deeds; and they decided that it would be better to do nothing, not because the world would then be changed for the better, but simply because only on this condition could they go on living with themselves at all. Hence, they also chose to die when they forced to participate...the precondition for this kind of judging is not a highly developed intelligence...in moral matters, but rather the disposition to live together explicitly with oneself...to be engaged in that silent dialogue *between me and myself* which, since Socrates and Plato, we usually call *thinking* (Italic added).<sup>191</sup>

Arendt wrote this passage after her encounter with Eichmann but the essence of her argument against those who collaborated can be traced to her earlier thoughts. What Arendt tried to investigate is the character of those who did not collaborate with the Nazis and she discovered that such individuals were able to exercise their faculty of action through their sound judgment even in the face of totalitarianism. As we might remember,

she rejected the claim of those who held that cooperation is inevitable in the face of totalitarian power, “as though there existed a law of human nature compelling everybody to lose his dignity in the face of disaster.” The point at stake is that those who refused to participate in public life under dictatorship did in fact, although indirectly, refuse to support the regime. As Arendt notes, “we have only for a moment to imagine what would happen to any of these forms of government if enough people would *act*...and refuse support, even without active resistance and rebellion, to see how effective a weapon this could be (Italic added).”<sup>192</sup>

Those who refused to cooperate with the Nazi regime, Arendt insists, did not need a “highly developed intelligence in moral matters” so that they could see its evil aspects; she discovered that the only thing they fell back upon was their ‘basic’ experience of thinking as two-in one. I use the word ‘basic’ since it seems to fit perfectly Arendt’s understanding of this activity: “This kind of thinking, though at the root of all philosophical thought, is not technical and does not concern theoretical problems.”<sup>193</sup> This kind of thinking, as in action, derives its meaningfulness and consequently its uniqueness from one’s awareness of his existence. The lack of this kind of thinking is the charge Arendt carried against ordinary individuals who fanatically followed the clichés of ideology whether it was Zionism or race supremacy. It was also the charge against mass society which alienated individuals from the public, political reality of the world. Last but not least, the same charge was turned against Eichmann. Adolf Eichmann was a great occasion for Arendt to show how this innocent lack of thinking, which in itself was in no way criminal, might have disastrous and evil consequences. As we saw earlier, Eichmann was not a man of demonic character; he was a simple ordinary man and his chief mistake was his failure to think genuinely *by himself*; what he did, rather, was to think through the clichés of the movement. As we shall conclude later, Eichmann was a parvenu, the opposite of the pariah type of existence.

Arendt’s concept of action in *The Human Condition*, which is defined as the self disclosure of the agent through the medium of speech and action or the manifestation of the ‘who’ or the beginning of someone through action, was contrasted with two activities each of them yielding conformity. Unlike the activity of action where the disclosure of the agent is the point at stake, the concepts of work and labor did not show any concern

for the individual as an irreplaceable agent. This idea of action was in fact an attempt to generalize the conclusions of Arendt's earlier insights on the pariah type of existence which she developed through her grappling with the Jewish question beginning with her study of Rahel Varnhagen. We were told that the pariah is someone who is conscious of his political status and that he preserves this status since it constitutes the location from which he views reality and begins his action. Unlike the parvenu who tends to disclose himself through social masks in order to be like-everybody-else and so to hide his existence, the pariah faces this existential fact and uses it as the main source of his thoughts and actions. While the parvenu's thoughts are characterized by their lack of meaningfulness, since they do not correspond to real experience, the thoughts of the pariah are meaningful by virtue of their ties to experience in the twofold sense: they arise out of real experience and they have the capacity for disclosing their author. Action as presented in *The Human Condition* presupposes this account of the pariah type of existence: the sense of reality that the pariah possesses by virtue of his consciousness, which manifests itself through his genuine actions and thoughts, became the foundation of Arendt's later concept of action which emphasized before anything else the spontaneous self-revelatory character of the agent. It is in this sense that the concept of action was a generalization of the conclusions she reached in her study of the Jewish question.

In Arendt's essay, 'Philosophy and Politics' (1954), roughly four years before the publication of *The Human Condition*, Arendt expanded this understanding of the genuine experience of thinking and acting after her investigation of the status of the pariah. In this article, she attributed this genuine experience of thinking to Socrates and compared it with the Platonic type of thinking. Socrates' understanding of *doxa*, we were told, does justice to both the subjectivity of the author, his self-disclosure, and the objectivity of the world about which our judgments are made. In Arendt's characterization of Socrates' thinking she pointed out not only to its relevance to politics and plurality where we speak and act with others, but also to its ethical significance. This moral relevance is of paramount importance to my account of Arendt's thought since it is a clear indication of her concern with thinking and its relation to prohibiting us from evil doing before her reporting on the trial of Eichmann. We saw earlier in this second chapter that Socrates'

characterization of the activity of thinking as two-in-one allowed him to discover ‘conscience,’ although he did not have a name for it, in his statement that “it is much better to be in disagreement with the whole world than *being one* to be in a disagreement with myself.” Conscience, Arendt believes, depends on this two-in-one characterization of our mental life or thinking: “Conscience in its most general sense is...based on the fact that I can be in agreement or disagreement with myself, and that means that I do not only appear to others but also to myself.” This kind of thinking prohibits us from doing evil because in the end we don’t want to live with ourselves as murderers or liars.

It is important to note that this concern with thinking in relation to ethics and the emphasis she put on its solitary origin, the dialogue between me-and-myself, did not lead Arendt to the belief that there are some universal or transcendent standards according to which one should behave. In fact, Arendt was explicit in her doubts of those who claim that they adhere to moral norms and that their attachment to these standards secures their judgments; of this first kind of thinking, she wrote: “the total moral collapse of respectable society during the Hitler regime may teach us that under such circumstances those who cherish values and hold fast to moral norms and standards are not reliable: we now know that moral norms and standards can be changed overnight, and that all that then will be left is the mere habit of holding fast to something.”<sup>194</sup> The best way for securing good thinking and consequently good judgment, Arendt believes, is the Socratic method. Arendt’s interest in this kind of thinking is its strong tie with experience and its living process: “Much more reliable [than the first kind of thinking] will be the doubters and skeptics, not because skepticism is good or doubting wholesome, but because they are used to examine things and to make up their minds. Best of all will be those who know only one thing for certain: that whatever else happens, as long as we live we shall have to live together with ourselves.”<sup>195</sup> The skeptical habit of examining everything and arriving at conclusions without ‘falling back’ upon some standards can secure a good judgment better than the case of those who adhere to certain ‘truths.’ The latter kind of thinking is not reliable enough for Arendt since she discovered that those who practice it might “automatically” change their beliefs completely “overnight.” What is missing in this kind of thinking is the quality of examining and questioning our experiences. Those who follow the Socratic discovery of ‘living together with oneself’, on the other hand, are

appreciated and considered the 'best' by Arendt because their activity of thinking did not only arise out of experience but also was bound to it.

Eichmann *was* a parvenu in Arendt's assessment because he was a conformist, a mere follower of the 'law of the land.' He 'thought' that it is worthwhile to live an unexamined life; that it is enough for someone to 'obey' his superiors. Eichmann failed to 'think' by himself and his only thoughts were consequently the 'standards' of Nazi Germany. In a language almost astonishingly identical to her early description of the Jewish parvenu, whose chief goal is to join 'good society' and to be one of its members, she described Eichmann:

Eichmann...has always been overawed by 'good society,' and the politeness he often showed to German-speaking Jewish functionaries was to a large extent the result of his recognition that he was dealing with people who were socially his superiors...What he fervently believed in up to the end was success, the chief standard of 'good society' as he knew it...His conscience was indeed set at rest when he saw the zeal and eagerness with which 'good society' everywhere reacted as he did. He did not need to 'close his ears to the voice of conscience,' as the judgment has it, not because he had none, but because his conscience spoke with a 'respectable voice,' with the voice of respectable society around him <sup>196</sup>

## CHAPTER 3 ON THINKING

Arendt's concern with thinking in her earlier writings became more than a concern later in her career; her late writings were devoted entirely to the activity of thinking in our active lives, more precisely, in relation to moral considerations, which are political by implication. In her last unfinished posthumous work, *The Life of the Mind*, she aimed at "developing a phenomenology of thinking."<sup>1</sup> It is the most philosophical book she wrote. Her friend, Hans Jonas, recalled a conversation he had with Arendt: she told him, "I have done my bit in politics...no more of that; from now on, and for what is left, I will deal with transpolitical things", commenting on this conversation, Jonas said: she "means philosophy...age issued its imperative and its chance."<sup>2</sup> However, between her report on the Eichmann trial and her last unfinished work, there were a few essays devoted directly to the activity of thinking and, unlike *The Life of the Mind*, they bear some relation to politics. Her essay 'Thinking and Moral Consideration,' which we shall discuss later in detail, is one of these essays which were used in her last work.<sup>3</sup> I will provide an account of Arendt's final thoughts on thinking based primarily on this article; I will also refer to *The Life of the Mind* as well as some of her late essays whenever necessary.

Arendt opened her essay by asking some questions that haunted her mind after witnessing Eichmann, of these questions she asked:

Is our ability to judge, to tell right from wrong, beautiful from ugly, dependent on our faculty of thought? Do the inability to think and a disastrous failure of what we commonly call conscience coincide?...Could the activity of thinking as such, the habit of examining and reflecting upon whatever happens to come to pass, regardless of specific content and quite independent of results, could this activity be of such nature that it "conditions" men against evildoing? (The very word *con-science*...points in this direction insofar as it means "to know with and by myself"<sup>4</sup>

To avoid any misunderstanding, Arendt distinguishes between knowledge and thinking. Following Kant, Arendt equates knowing with the "intellect, which desires and is capable of certain, verifiable knowledge."<sup>5</sup> Our desire to know can always be fulfilled by reaching its goal; and since knowledge of something always leads us to knowledge of

another, this activity leaves us a growing treasure of knowledge stored by every civilization. In this sense, knowing is said to be a world-building activity. Thinking, which Arendt equates with 'reason,' is primarily a search for meaning; it leaves nothing tangible behind and if it were a reflection that does not serve knowledge, it would become, following Heidegger, 'out of order'. Thus, thinking is a self-destructive activity because as soon as it establishes any principle or axiom it rethinks and doubts it. Thinking "deals with objects that are absent, removed from direct sense perception. An object of thought is always a re-presentation, that is, something or somebody that is actually absent and present only to the mind which, by virtue of imagination, can make it present in the form of an image."<sup>6</sup> Arendt believes that the chief characteristic of thinking is that it interrupts all other activities with no exception; the moment we begin to think we must stop everything else so we do not interrupt the thinking process. Thinking, Arendt suggests, is a process that takes us away from being-in-the-world and to this extent it is contrary to the human condition. The moment we think it is as though we move into a different world: "In order to think about somebody, he must be removed from our senses; so long as we are together with him we don't think of him—though we may gather impressions that later become food for thought; to think about somebody who is present implies removing ourselves surreptitiously from his company and acting as though he were no longer there."<sup>7</sup>

Arendt's primary question is about the relation between the ability or inability to think and the problem of evil. Now, if thinking is a resultless activity and a process that takes us away from the world, how can it be relevant to the world in which we live? Any answer to this question, Arendt argues, must arise from the thinking activity itself, that is to say, if thinking is resultless then we have nothing to fall back upon but the *performance* itself. The 'everybody' who performs thinking does not write books about this experience and the 'few,' that Kant calls 'professional thinkers,' "were never particularly eager to write about the experience itself, perhaps because they knew that thinking is resultless by nature. For their books with their doctrines were inevitably composed with an eye to the many, who wish to see results and don't care to draw distinctions between knowing and thinking, between truth and meaning."<sup>8</sup> Rejecting the choice between the experience of the 'everybody' or 'the few' and the arbitrariness of

introspection, Arendt decides to look for a model. This model must satisfy the condition of being able to “think without becoming a philosopher,” and of being “a citizen among citizens.”<sup>9</sup> In other words, he must be an actor as well as a thinker. You must have guessed that Arendt decided to look at Socrates. The justifications for her choice of Socrates as the representative of ‘thinking’ are the same reasons that she discussed in her early essay ‘Philosophy and Politics.’ Socratic dialogues do not provide any results; they move in circles without ever arriving at a definite conclusion. Without ever teaching a doctrine on virtue, or believing in its teachability in the first place, Socrates “seems indeed to have held that talking and thinking about piety, justice, courage, and the rest were liable to make men more pious, more just, more courageous, even though they were not given either definitions or “value” to direct their further conduct.”<sup>10</sup> The Socratic experience of thinking can best be illustrated by the similes he gave to himself: gadfly, midwife, or an electric ray. Like a gadfly he arouses the citizens and urges them to think and to examine matters. Like a midwife, he helps people to give birth to their ideas, to purge them of their unexamined ‘opinions’ which prevent thinking. Like an electric ray, Socrates, who does not know the truth of his opinions, sticks to his perplexities by them, and paralyzes everyone that comes into contact with him through these opinions.

Arendt’s point is pretty clear: *thinking* is the tool for ‘defrosting’ the frozen thoughts of our minds. Socrates believed that he could teach thinking by arousing others to think even in the absence of any positive doctrine to teach. Thus, unlike ‘professional thinkers’ who want to solve the riddles of the universe and demonstrate them to everybody, Socrates wanted to check with others in order to see if his perplexities were shared by them. The immediate result of this Socratic teaching is that thinking becomes a dangerous activity by establishing the habit of questioning almost everything: “thinking inevitably has a destructive undermining effect on all established criteria, values, measurements for good and evil, in short on those customs and rules of conduct we treat of in morals and ethics.”<sup>11</sup> Non-thinking, on the other hand, is also dangerous although it “seems so recommendable a state for political and moral affairs”<sup>12</sup>: “By shielding people against the dangers of examination, it [non-thinking] teaches them to hold fast to whatever the prescribed rules of conduct may be at a given time in a given society. What

people then get used to...[is] the possession of rules under which to subsume particulars...they get used to never make up their minds.”<sup>13</sup>

To return to the relation between the ability or inability to think and the problem of evil, Arendt believes that there are two positive statements by Socrates that deal with this question. Although these statements occur in the *Gorgias*, a dialogue that does not belong to the early Socratic dialogues, she insists that this dialogue is aporetic and so it still has the mark of Socrates. The first, states that “it is better to be wronged than to do wrong,” while the second is: “It would better for me that my lyre or a chorus I directed should be out of tune and loud with discord, and that multitudes of men should disagree with me rather than that I, *being one*, should be out of harmony with myself and contradict *me*.”<sup>14</sup> Arendt believes that these two statements presuppose the belief that if you think then you will come to realize that an unexamined life is not worth living. These two statements, however, should not be understood “as the result of some cogitation about morality; they are insights, to be sure, but insights of experience, and as far as the thinking process is concerned they are at best incidental by-products.”<sup>15</sup> Arendt’s discussion of thinking as two-in-one is a topic that she discussed earlier in her career and in this present discussion she introduced some minor changes: Everything has an identity and since everything exists among a plurality of things it is not simply what it is in its identity--it is also different from other things. Thus, difference belongs to the very concept of identity. Spinoza was aware of this when he claimed that every determination is a negation. Now, when I appear to others I always appear as one, otherwise it would be difficult for me to be recognizable. This is not the case when I try to relate to myself: “This curious thing that I am needs no plurality in order to establish difference; it carries the difference within itself when it says: “I am I.” So long as I am conscious, that is, conscious of myself, I am identical with myself only for others to whom I appear as one and the same. For myself, articulating this being- conscious-of-myself, I am inevitably two-in-one.”<sup>16</sup> This original split, two-in-one, is what constitutes *consciousness* and it is the presupposition of ‘thinking.’ The major task of thinking is to actualize this difference given in consciousness, that is, to bring about some silent dialogue between me-and-myself, which Plato called thinking. This Socratic teaching implies, albeit only in passing, that plurality is the basic condition of the lives of all men; that we do not live in

the singular. To Socrates, “this two-in-one meant simply that if you want to think you must see to it that the two who carry on the thinking dialogue be in good shape, that the partners be friends. It is better for you to suffer than to do wrong because you can remain friend of the sufferer; who would want to be the friend of and have to live together with a murderer? Not even a murderer.”<sup>17</sup> The dialogue that Shakespeare’s Richard III led with himself was a good occasion for Arendt to show how this ‘soundless dialogue’ takes place. After committing a great number of crimes, Richard says while by himself in his home:

What do I fear? Myself ? There’s none else by.

Richard loves Richard: that is, I am I

Is there a murderer here? NO. Yes, I am:

Then fly. What from myself? Great reason why—

Lest I revenge. What, myself upon myself?

O no! Alas, I rather hate myself

For hateful deeds committed by myself.

I am a villain. Yet I lie, I am not

Fool, of myself speak well. Fool, do not flatter.

When no longer by himself, Richard joins the company of his friends and says:

Conscience is but a word that cowards use,

Devised at first to keep the strong in awe<sup>18</sup>

Conscience, Arendt believes, is a side-effect of thinking. It is an “afterthought, that thought which is aroused either by a crime, as in the case of Richard himself, or by unexamined opinions, as in the case of Socrates, or as the anticipated fear of such afterthoughts... What makes a man fear this conscience is the anticipation of the presence of a witness who awaits him only *if* and when he goes home.”<sup>19</sup> This witness who awaits at home, conscience, owes its existence in the first place to thinking, this hidden activity which takes us away from the world. The safest way for a criminal, if he decided not to face his conscience, would be to ‘forget’ what he has done and not to remember it.

Remembering and thinking are two activities that are connected in a special way: “No one can remember what he has not thought through in talking about it with himself.”<sup>20</sup>

Most evildoers, Arendt argues, are those who don’t remember--simply because they did

not think about the matter; and without remembrance nothing can hold them back to their actions. In her essay, 'Some Questions of Moral Philosophy', Arendt supports her belief of thinking as a fundamental experience of the self which gives rise to moral considerations by claiming that "The very few moral propositions which supposedly sum up all special precepts and commands, such as 'Love thy neighbor as *thyself*,' 'Don't do unto others what you don't want to be done to *yourself*,' ...all take as their standard the Self and hence the intercourse of man with himself."<sup>21</sup> The Socratic moral propositions, however, which are derived from the self and its experience, in contradistinction to those derived from religion for example, cannot be expected to offer any positive suggestions regarding our conduct. In other words, they are incapable of telling you what to do in specific situation; all they are capable of is to tell you what *not* to do: "the only recommendation we are entitled to expect from the 'it is better to be at odds with the whole world than being one to be at odds with myself,' will always remain entirely negative. It will never tell you what to do, only prevent you from doing certain things."<sup>22</sup>

Arendt's claim that moral propositions derived from the self can only tell us what *not* to do seems to be stated with no argument. In other words, the question: why is thinking incapable of telling us what to do? is not adequately answered by Arendt. To be sure, according to her analysis of thinking, there is nothing within this activity that would prevent its recommendation of positive moral prescriptions. Of course, she claimed earlier that thinking is resultless, but *telling* us what not to do is in fact a kind of result. How can we understand, then, her claim that thinking can only tell us what *not* to do? I believe that her fear of turning the individual process of thinking into an education, which paves the way for indoctrination, was behind her refusal to allow any positive moral codes in the domain of thinking. Indoctrination can be appealing to many people and it seems to be desirable sometimes since it is a shortcut: instead of the confusion that thinking brings in by virtue of its questioning of everything, the introduction of some doctrines seems to be an easy way-out of such confusion. There is some evidence for my claim in one of her earlier essays 'Understanding and Politics,' where the terms 'understanding' and 'thinking' were used interchangeably:

As an attempt to understand, it [indoctrination] transcends the comparatively solid realm of facts and figures, from whose infinity it seeks to escape; as a short-cut in the

transcending process itself, which it arbitrarily interrupts by pronouncing apodictic statements as though they had the reliability of facts and figures, it destroys the activity of understanding altogether. Indoctrination is dangerous because it springs primarily from a perversion, not of knowledge, but of understanding<sup>23</sup>

The effect of indoctrination is the same as introducing Platonic truth in the political realm, namely, destroying our unique different opinions, which owe their existence to our different locations in the world from which we view reality. Arendt's fear of introducing any positive moral codes in the public realm seems to be consistent with her earlier emphasis on the 'truth of opinion'--which definitely does not mean her rejection of morality in the public realm. The Socratic proposition which tells us what not to do, Arendt tells us in *Between Past and Future*, "though one may doubt that it ever had a direct political consequence, its impact upon practical conduct as an ethical precept is undeniable."<sup>24</sup>

The sad truth about evil, according to Arendt, is that the greatest part of it is done by those who are not wicked or stupid, by those who do not make up their mind, those who do not think. Those who do not think are described by Arendt in a language similar to the language used in her analysis of Eichmann:

He who does not know the intercourse between me and myself (in which we examine what we say and what we do) will not mind contradicting himself, and this means he will never be either able or willing to give account of what he says or does; nor will he mind committing any crime, since he can be sure that it will be forgotten the next moment<sup>25</sup>

Thinking, or for that matter non-thinking, according to this analysis is a potentiality for *everybody*. Arendt is concerned with the common man, not with "Nazis or convinced Bolsheviks, not with saints and heroes, and not with born criminals. For if there is any such thing as what we call morality for want of a better term, it certainly concerns such common people and common happenings."<sup>26</sup> If thinking is a potentiality in everybody, and if the ability to tell right from wrong is connected with this potentiality, then, Arendt concludes "we must be able to demand its exercise from every sane person, no matter how erudite or ignorant, intelligent or stupid, he may happen to be. Kant...was much bothered by the common opinion that philosophy is only for the few, precisely because of its moral implications."<sup>27</sup>

In Arendt's description of thinking, a contrast with commonsense is frequently recalled. This contrast is important to her because of its political consequences. Commonsense, we were told in *The Human Condition*, occupies a high rank in the hierarchy of political qualities because of its intrinsic relation to the world and plurality. Each of our senses brings to us particular isolated data of reality. These different senses, according to Arendt, are ruled over and kept together by commonsense. Commonsense, therefore, is the sixth sense that fits man into the reality surrounding him. In other words, it provides the context through which different sense perceptions are known to disclose reality and not felt as irritations of our bodies. The reality of the world, on the other hand, can be gauged by its commonality to us; and it is the task of commonsense to make us feel that we are members of a community and enable us to communicate things perceived by our senses. Commonsense accomplishes this task by the help of the faculty of imagination, which has the ability to present to me something that is absent. Thus, if you decide to communicate a personal event to someone, you presuppose that he has the ability to be 'in your shoes', that is, that he is able to present to himself something that is absent for him as if it were present. The assumption for such communication is that both speakers share the same world and that they trust its reality. Apart from our agreement or disagreement with Arendt in her analysis of commonsense, the point at stake is that commonsense seems to be a special kind of thinking. It is the kind of thinking that enables us to go on with our lives, which include all our practical concerns.

I would like to suggest that such thinking seems to be guided by what Arendt called in *The Human Condition* the 'web' of human affairs, which was described as the immediate result of collective acting and speaking. As I mentioned in the second chapter, this 'web' has a few basic features: first, it bears a strong relation not only to the agent of whom it is a disclosure, but also to the world since "most words and deeds are *about* some worldly objective reality."<sup>28</sup> The web of human affairs is more or less the result of men's interest in the world through their words and deeds. Second, Arendt talked about this web as something that arises spontaneously whenever men exist together in the mode of togetherness and she also suggested that this web varies with each group of people. The last feature of this 'web' is its 'background' function: the meaning of any action, Arendt believes, cannot be understood without an already existing background. A good or

evil deed cannot be understood as such in isolation from the surrounding environment that informs our decisions. The matter at stake is that it is difficult for us to agree with Arendt's account of commonsense without assuming some 'framework' or some 'background' that would permit the function of commonsense in the first place. The basic role of commonsense, we were told, is to orient the individual into his world and a community of citizens of which he is a member. Commonsense, with the help of the faculty of imagination, allows the individual to communicate his affairs with others even though they did not witness such affairs. The question is, however, how such communication could exist in the first place in the absence of a shared 'background' or 'culture'? One can list numerous examples where words or deeds can be easily misinterpreted and distorted. If commonsense is not guided by such unified 'web' it will easily lose its 'essence.' It is unfortunate that Arendt did not make such a connection between commonsense and the web of human affairs. However, in her analysis of the faculty of judgment, which we shall discuss later, Arendt seems to be able to overcome this difficulty; this is not due to some 'guiding principles' inherent in the faculty itself, but because such principles are not needed at all for its function.

Contrasting commonsense and thinking, I mentioned earlier, is a frequent practice of Arendt. While the mark of commonsense is its openness to the world, thinking is described as a silent private activity that takes us away from the world since the moment we think, we must stop everything else. Arendt describes the relation between these two faculties as warfare:

The whole history of philosophy, which tells us so much about the objects of thought and so little about the process of thinking itself, is shot through with intramural warfare between man's common sense, this highest, sixth sense that fits our five senses into a common world and enables us to orient ourselves in it, and man's faculty of thinking by virtue of which he willfully removes himself from it<sup>29</sup>

This is another paradox presented by Arendt: Although thinking removes us from the world, it is the only activity that enables us to fight any doctrine or ideology that shields us from reality by virtue of its habit of questioning. How can we resolve this paradox, tension or 'intramural warfare'? Part of the story here has to do with the conditions under which thinking or commonsense is recommended.

‘Ideal’ action or speech, in *normal situations*, we were told in *The Human Condition*, is supposed to have the quality of disclosing the ‘who’ of the agent. Anything that an actor does or says must bear a relation to him since it will reveal *his* point of view regarding the world. However, there are moments in history where a separation between the agent and his acts does in fact occur; they take place “whenever *human togetherness* is lost, that is, when people are only for or against other people (my emphasis).”<sup>30</sup> In cases of war, for example, speech loses its meaningfulness; it ceases to be a disclosure and it becomes a mere means to an end, for example, when speech is used to deceive an enemy or used for propaganda purposes. Speech in these instances, as Arendt describes it, becomes ‘mere talk’. In normal situations, action and speech, which are determined by the ‘web’ of human affairs, have the ability to disclose who we are in relation to our common world--a disclosure that always makes reference to the background against which the distinctness of our actions is seen. Under such normal situations, commonsense plays a decisive role since it is literally the *common-sense* that fits us into our common world and thus it assures action of its relatedness to the world. The difficulty with the above analysis of commonsense and action is this: it can only work in normal situations, that is, whenever people live in the mode of togetherness where their actions and speeches do disclose who they are. The realm of human affairs, Arendt believes, is fragile and open to countless threats. Standards, norms, traditions and even commonsense can be easily destroyed and replaced under the pressure of mass society, totalitarianism or even under the rule of some dictators. In such an extraordinary situation, it is difficult for our judgments to make reference to such standards and norms simply because they do not exist anymore. In times of emergencies there seems to be nothing to fall back upon but our thinking which might secure a right choice through the exercise of the faculty of judgment.

Arendt’s thoughts on thinking are the result of her observation of those who did not collaborate with the Nazis, those whose beliefs remained intact even ‘when the chips were down.’

If you examine the few, the very few, who in the moral collapse of Nazi Germany remained completely intact and free of all guilt, you will discover that they never went through anything like a great moral conflict or a crises of conscience. They did not

ponder the various issues—the issue of the lesser evil or of loyalty to their country or to their oath, or whatever else they might have been at stake...they never doubted that crimes remained crimes even if legalized by the government, and that it was better not to participate in these crimes under any circumstances. In other words, they did not feel an obligation but acted according to something which was self evident to them even though it was no longer self-evident to those around them. Hence their conscience...had no obligatory character, it said, “This I *can't* do,” rather than, “This I *ought* not to do”.<sup>31</sup>

Those who refused to collaborate with the crimes of Nazis did so, not because of their possession of higher moral education or their adherence to fine religious teachings since both education and religion turned out to be in the service of the state, but they relied on the Socratic experience of thinking of the two-in-one, which, as we saw, gives rise to conscience. “Socratic morality,” Arendt claims, “has revealed itself as the only working morality in borderline situations, that is, in times of crisis and emergency. When standards are no longer valid anyhow...nothing is left but the example of Socrates.”<sup>32</sup>

While commonsense seems to be an acceptable form of thinking in healthy societies, Socratic thinking, of which conscience is by-product, seems to be the only ‘working morality’ in times of crisis. Socratic thinking, or thinking without grounds, is different from thinking along the lines of commonsense because it arises from the exclusive experience of the self. This self-experience of thinking, however, does not destroy commonsense; indeed, thinking plays a decisive role in restoring commonsense by making use of it through *judging*, or the faculty of judgment.

The faculty of judgment is the closest of our mental faculties to the world since it deals with particulars. The process of judging consists in subsuming a particular under a general rule where you can see the general in the particular. Arendt’s basic interest in the problem of judgment, or how to tell right from wrong, led her to examine Kant’s third critique of taste. Kant’s account of aesthetic judgments was an interesting case for Arendt particularly because he thought that in making aesthetic judgment we judge without having general rules to go by. Arendt used Kant’s results in the field of morality and by doing so she assumed some similarity between aesthetic and moral judgments. If her use of Kant is apt to be criticized by anyone of us, she would reply: “In justification, I will remind you of...the not very pleasant background of factual experience which gave rise to these considerations.”<sup>33</sup> Arendt refers to the total collapse in moral and religious

standards which took place in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Kant's analysis of aesthetic judgment can apply to the European man in his moral judgment, which also lacks any general rules and standards. Like Kant, who was outraged by the fact that judgments of taste and beauty could be decided arbitrarily without dispute or agreement, Arendt was also disturbed by this moral collapse. In the following remarks, I do not intend to provide an account of Kant's theory of judgment. It will be enough for my present purposes to point to Arendt's appropriation of Kant's theory.

To Kant as well as to Arendt, judgment springs from commonsense. Commonsense is the sense "which fits us into a community with others, makes us members of it and enables us to communicate things given by our private senses."<sup>34</sup> These 'functions' of commonsense are possible with the help of the faculty of imagination, which enables us to present something to our minds that is not present. Thus, commonsense "can think...in the place of everybody else, so that when somebody makes the judgment, this is beautiful, he does not mean merely to say this pleases me...but he claims assent from others because in judging he has already taken them into account and hence hopes that his judgment will carry a certain general, though perhaps not universal, validity."<sup>35</sup> Although I take account of others when judging, this does not mean that my judgment conforms to theirs; it is still my judgment since it represents what I think is right even when I abandon my own judgment and adopt that of the others. Kant did not put any limit on the number of those whose judgments are presented to my mind and he believed that the more judgments you consider in your judgment, "the more *representative* it will be."<sup>36</sup> Another reason for *considering* the judgments of others in our judgments is the fact that, according to Arendt, "we are considerate in the original sense of the word, we consider the existence of others and we must try to win their agreement."<sup>37</sup>

In matters of right and wrong when there are no 'general' standards to hold on to, the faculty of judgment must remain bound to the 'particular' or the 'example,' which through the use of imagination inherent in commonsense becomes 'exemplary.' Arendt explains this through an example of a table. To the question, what is a table? One can answer by each of the following: 1. by referring to Plato's 'ideal' or Kant's 'schematic' table to which every table must conform 2. by abstraction: through stripping all tables

from their secondary qualities until arriving at the common qualities of all tables 3. by choosing “the best among all tables you know of or can imagine, and say this is an *example* of how tables should be constructed and how they should look like.”<sup>38</sup> Under conditions of destruction and collapse of all moral standards, the only morality that thinking can hold on to is that of the ‘particular’ or the ‘example,’ which *becomes exemplary* and valid for other particular instances through the faculty of judgment.

Arendt argues:

There are many concepts in the historical and political sciences which are arrived at in this way. Most political virtues and vices are thought of in terms of exemplary individuals: Achilles for courage, Solon for insight (wisdom), etc...Examples, which are the “go-cart” of all judging activities, are also and especially the guideposts of all moral thought. The extent to which the old...statement “It is better to suffer wrong than to do wrong,” has won the agreement of civilized men is due primarily to the fact that Socrates gave an example and hence became an example for a certain way of conduct and a certain way of deciding between right and wrong...We judge and tell right from wrong by having present in our mind some incident and some person, absent in time or space, that have become examples.”<sup>39</sup>

In times of emergency when things fall apart, the political and moral significance of thinking shines forth through our ability to tell right from wrong. This ability which relates us to particulars depends “upon our choice of company, of those with whom we wish to spend our lives...this company is chosen by thinking in examples...of persons dead or alive, real or fictitious, and in examples of incidents, past or present.”<sup>40</sup>

Thinking according to Arendt deals with invisibles or representations and it is described as the silent dialogue of two-in-one. Conscience, the company or the witness of all my actions, owes its existence in the first place to thinking, this hidden activity which takes us away from the world as long as we are thinking. As long as I am not thinking I am one, and the moment I begin to think it is as though I am split into two. While thinking actualizes internally the difference in me through the act of splitting, judging liberates thinking by making it manifest in the world of appearances. When standards lose their validity and non-thinking becomes a social phenomenon as in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, thinking ceases to be a marginal political activity and becomes a form of *action*.

When everybody is swept away unthinkingly by what everybody else does and believes in, those who think are drawn out of hiding because their refusal to join in is conspicuous and thereby becomes a kind of action<sup>41</sup>

## CONCLUSION

I began this dissertation with an examination of Arendt's so-called 'early writings' in which the discussion of Jewishness was the prevailing theme. In her dissertation on Rahel Varnhagen and her few articles on Zionism, I suggested, there was a unifying thread that ran through her various arguments. Arendt began her quarrel with one type of thinking called 'assimilationist' and Rahel Varnhagen was a good candidate for Arendt's criticism of this kind of thinking. After many years of concealing her identity as a Jew and seeing the world from the standpoint of the common men, who were in fact anti-Semites, Rahel came to realize that she could not bear such burden and that she must defend her own location from which she views the world. Arendt wrote her dissertation on Rahel with a fundamental distinction in her mind between two types of Jews, or two types of human existence, the pariah and parvenu. Lying, Arendt discovered, is the primary trait of the parvenu and his useful means of becoming 'like everyone else.' To the parvenu, every urge to genuinely express oneself and therefore one's unique personal view is suppressed in order to achieve some 'social' status. The pariah type of existence, on the contrary, begins with asserting the unique experience of the individual even when the purchase price of this experience is too high, to be an outcast outside of society. This emphasis on independent and free self-revelation, I believe, became the main theme of Arendt's later writings.

The rise of totalitarianism became an ominous phenomenon for Arendt. In her study of totalitarianism she became convinced that there was a dangerous element in totalitarian ideology or for that matter any ideology. Ideological thinking presents itself in a logical form and by virtue of its inner consistency assumes its legitimate application to reality. The Nazis believed that they 'know' the law of history and that it is their time to make their appearance in it; in Arendt's words, they held 'the key to history.' If reality did not correspond adequately to this logic then everything must be justified even the use of violence so that some harmony between 'ideas' and 'reality' can be achieved. Arendt diagnosed this ideological thinking as a complete separation from reality and believed that the fate of any ideology is a horrific collapse under the weight of experience. Totalitarianism succeeded in eliminating the 'public space' or the free political sphere

where individuals do matter qua individuals. Not only did totalitarianism succeed in defining the individual as an instantiation of some group identity, according to race so that his uniqueness is lost as an individual, it also created a gap between the individual himself and the world, by depriving him of his political rights to express himself and thus made his actions ineffective and his words meaningless. This Arendtian charge against totalitarian societies was also directed to 'mass society'. The latter was characterized by Arendt as the result of eliminating the individual aspect of knowledge from politics. Mass society is a condition in which independent thinking and new 'actions' are absent; it is a condition in which men 'behave' as if they members of one family where each member is required to multiply the views of his relative uncritically. Thus, with the rise of totalitarianism and mass society the gulf between individuals and their world was deepened.

But ideological thinking was the fashion of the age and almost most politicians expressed themselves through ideology whether they were socialists, liberals, communists...etc. The Zionists were no exception from this rule, Arendt believes, as she spent almost twenty years criticizing their approach to politics. Zionist ideology was the invention of some 'intellectual' Jews who advocated 'politics from above.' The phrase 'politics from above' was meant to show a contrast between those who derive the validity of politics from a sphere beyond the accidental nature of action, namely, the mind and its ability to provide 'keys' or 'guides to history,' and those who believed that politics must arise 'from below,' from the individual's actions which reflect his independent free thinking. In Arendt's critique of Zionism, she made use of her earlier distinction between the parvenu and the pariah as she continued her critique against any kind of thinking that shows an escape from reality, from responsibility towards the world and our fellowmen. Arendt did not hesitate to state time and again that such an approach to politics is doomed to failure as she pointed out to the troubled situation in the near east.

Arendt's new interest in political theory carried within itself the conclusions she reached in her early studies of the Jewish question and totalitarianism. She became convinced that the genuine activity of thinking which gives rise to 'action' has lost its capacity as a self-revealing faculty in the new age. Independent thinking was lost not only because of the destruction of the 'public realm' caused by totalitarianism but also

because we misunderstood this activity in its relation to experience. Re-thinking thinking was the primary task of Arendt's interest in political theory and when she embarked upon this mission she decided to analyze the relation between thinking, which historically was associated with philosophers, and action or the realm of politics. We were told that the trial and death of Socrates was the occasion that permitted the initial separation between philosophy and politics. The gulf that was opened historically with the death of Socrates separated two modes of thinking with regard to politics, namely, one that derives the validity of politics from the transcendent realm of 'ideas' and another that derives such validity from the immanent sphere of thinking in relation to experience. Plato, who represented the first type of thinking, was suspicious of any opinion taken by the majority and thus he looked for some absolute true standards that would govern the political realm; Socrates, who represented the second, denied possession of any transcendental truth in the political realm and was content with the 'truth' of opinion. The difference between both modes of thinking is obvious: Socrates believed that our ability to think and its manifestation in action or opinion has an intrinsic relation to the world; our opinions are nothing but our expressions of how the world opens up to us and that the same phenomenon can be thought of differently by many individuals. Plato's type of thinking, unsatisfied with such chaos in the political realm, established the realm of ideas which might introduce some reliability and solidity in the realm of human affairs. Thus, Plato established the belief that only philosophers are capable of 'knowing' the truth while 'doing' is reserved for other citizens. In the end, the realm of ideas was the first step in the detachment of thinking from experience.

*The Human Condition* was an important stage in Arendt's intellectual development. It was an exploration of this realm of experience or 'what we do' rather than an investigation of our mental activities. Although this work was an investigation of the realm of experience, Arendt's analysis of 'Action' offered us an insight into a specific kind of thinking which not only has roots in experience but also enables our actions and opinions to fit into this experience. This kind of thinking, I believe, is an extension of Arendt's early emphasis on free independent thought exemplified in her notion of the pariah and the Socratic type of thinking. When Arendt reported on the trial of Eichmann, she accused him of 'thoughtlessness.' This charge not only echoed Arendt's criticism of

mass society in which an individual becomes incapable of independent thought and comfortable in repeating his neighbor's opinions, but also her earlier critique of any detachment from reality whether through introspection and parvenu thinking, as in Rahel Varnhagen, or through clichés of the movement.

I believe that the unifying thread of Arendt's works and arguments is the political role of independent thinking which implies its freedom-- since one cannot think independently if he is not free. This independent thinking is the cornerstone of what I call 'political thinking,' by which I mean the type of thinking that does justice to both the reflective solitary ability of the mind and its instructions as well as experience fundamentally open to plurality of views and opinions. Arendt's views on 'political thinking,' in general, can be found in many scattered remarks in her discussions of the challenges and threats posed to the ability to think independently. A few years after the Eichmann trial, Arendt began to clarify and expand on the theme of thinking. One reason for this is her renewed interest in moral issues; and although these moral considerations were touched upon in her earlier works, she felt the need to elucidate and develop them. The challenges to 'political thinking' are either inward or outward as they overlap sometimes. Of the inward threats to political thinking Arendt discussed introspection and the appeal of ideological thinking. Both of these threats share the character of alienation from reality: because of her refusal to accept of the portrait ascribed to her by society, introspection was Rahel's way of denying the outside world. Rahel's active self-examination of her own ideas helped her to falsify anti-Semitism and therefore falsifying the misery of being born Jewish in anti-Semitic world. In the end, Rahel's thoughts replaced the outside world. Ideological thinking is also a dangerous potentiality of thinking arising, however, not from the need to escape from the world, but from the urge to make sense out of it. Most ideologies begin from certain assumptions *about* reality-- whether these assumptions spring from reality itself or from something beyond reality does not enter the argument since man himself is the one who utters such ideologies in both cases. Arendt insists, as we have seen earlier, that the logical structure with which most ideologies are equipped not only contradicts the accidental nature of history but also eradicates the unpredictability of 'action'—the manifestation of its freedom. But this charge cannot be directed only to ideologies, in fact, Arendt accuses the so-called

philosophies of history of committing the same fatal error. The problem with such philosophies is that they assumed the validity of their theories outside the accidental nature of history. Assuming this outside-objective status and its tendency to ignore the incidental opens the door for necessity. Thus, most ideologies and philosophies of history have this element of inevitability within themselves. To open the door for necessity means the destruction of the human capacity to begin something new or to act, the only activity where humans can show their differences.

Of the outward threats to political thinking one can mention totalitarianism and mass society. Totalitarianism as a political system has an ideological aspect. However, as Arendt notices, the horrifying practices of totalitarian regimes should not be attributed to its intellectual background; ideas are harmless and people who make use of them turn them into such practices. The point at stake is that people under conditions of totalitarianism lose the power to make their actions effective and their words meaningful. This is not to say that people under totalitarianism must accept their loss of independent thinking as an excuse for immoral practices; to be sure, Arendt never believed that this should be the case. She praised those who did not collaborate with the Nazis and claimed that they exemplified the true meaning of thinking. Mass society is another threat to political thinking. Whenever biological and material needs prevail in any society, human individuality and freedom are submerged into a collective concern for 'life.' In Mass society unity and conformity prevail. The unity of people in society is artificial since they are united in order to 'make living'. Arendt believes that such unity is apt to make everyone private since everyone will be concerned with the satisfaction of his own needs. People are united in 'society' because their needs and desires are the same and are catered for collectively—something that gives rise to *uniformity*. When the concern for life becomes the major concern of the public, people tend to ignore all other concerns of politics. They only look at politics as an administration of the life of mankind.

Arendt's later writings were concerned primarily with thinking. At first sight, this might look like a major break in her thought for after many years of devoting herself to action and politics she turned to discuss some dull questions of metaphysics such as, what is thinking? What is the faculty of imagination, judging or willing? The fact is that her concern with thinking is as early as her dissertation on Rahel and her focus on thinking

later in her life was nothing but a development of these themes. Aware of the imperfections in her tentative account of thinking, as we saw in the third chapter, Arendt attempted to present a synthesis between the Socratic description of thinking and Kant's theory of judgment. The result of this synthesis was a clarification of the tentative account of thinking she left us with in *The Human Condition*. In her last works, Arendt offered us a description, not a theory, of thinking that emphasizes on one hand her early notions of the pariah and the need for independent thought, and on the other its relation to politics. Arendt argued that thinking in itself is a hidden activity that deals with representations or with absents, and although this activity according to this description seems to be contrary to the human condition where people act and speak, it is nonetheless the most political of man's faculties. Thinking through its habit of questioning and examining even in the absence of moral codes and standards seems to be able to establish its own standards that carries some *general* validity and thus helps to restore to the community its missing commonsense. Standards established by thinking are in no way similar to the one ones derived from ideology or from contemplation; they are established through the *original* relation that thinking has with particulars, that is, through *examples*. Thinking establishes these standards through the faculty of judgment, which Arendt describes as the faculty that liberates thinking by making it manifest in the world of appearances. There is no other word to describe this liberating effect that actualizes thinking *politically* in the world of appearances but 'action.'

When everybody is swept away unthinkingly by what everybody else does and believes in, those who think are drawn out of hiding because their refusal to join in is conspicuous and thereby becomes a kind of action. The purging element in thinking, Socrates' midwifery, that brings out the implications of unexamined opinions and thereby destroys them—values, doctrines, theories, and even convictions--is political by implication. For this destruction has a liberating effect on another human faculty, the faculty of judgment, which one may call, with some justification, the most political of man's mental abilities. It is the faculty to judge particulars without subsuming them under those general rules which can be taught and learned until they grow into habits that can be replaced by other habits and rules.<sup>1</sup>

When Arendt wrote *The Human Condition* she was not interested, for practical purposes, in providing an account of thinking but she claimed albeit once, that action corresponds

to nothing but the hidden interior activity of thinking. Later in her life, endorsing Socrates, she uses Heidegger's metaphor comparing thinking to the wind: "The winds themselves are invisible, yet what they do is manifest to us and we somehow feel their approach."<sup>2</sup>

Arendt did not intend to present a 'theory' about 'political thinking' because any theory, at least in essence, sets itself outside the 'nature' of the object theorized about. In other words, any theory assumes that its own principles do apply to its object and thus it can lead to an understanding of this object; if we speak about political phenomena, then theory assumes its sound application and understanding of these political phenomena. "This means:" to use the words of Ernst Vollrath, "theory subjects the political realm to its own wholly unpolitical principles and maxims. The result is a considerable distortion of the political phenomenon, possibly tantamount to destruction of the political dimension." Arendt's approach, Vollrath suggests, "does not posit itself a priori outside the political field; rather, it is grown from within that field."<sup>3</sup> What does Arendt intend to do, if not presenting a theory? I believe that all she wanted to do is to present us with some guidelines about thinking in relation to politics--guidelines that would do justice to the reflective aspect of thinking as well as the plurality of opinions through which political phenomena appear to us. Such guidelines constitute the foundations of what I call 'political thinking.' Arendt's understanding of politics does not assume any stance outside the political realm; rather, it tries to understand it from the view point of the citizen who is at the center of all political phenomena. Understanding politics from 'below' led her to the belief that the freedom of the citizen cannot be sacrificed since it is the basic assumption of his understanding of the world and his actions toward it. Freedom, in a sense, is the fate of the agent since his *actions*, which spring from a dark place inaccessible to others, namely, thinking, are ultimately unpredictable. The emergence of these actions in the world, by virtue of their being a disclosure of thinking, carries within itself the trace of a unique independent thinker. In her career, Arendt examined many types of thinking that one may find in history books as well as in everyday life and she pointed out the dangers inherent in them. Most types of thinking in politics have an intrinsic tendency to alienate the individual from political phenomena by either establishing a transcendent concept of world order or by distorting his basic natural

understanding of political phenomena. In the modern world, Arendt noticed that such alienation from the world may not be caused by either of the above reasons; alienation can be simply the result of an innocent non-thinking. Non-thinking in the modern age, she believed, has led to countless catastrophes and the only thing she hoped for was an engagement in the world by exercising our faculty of telling right from wrong.

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## **Chapter Two: A Closer Look at 'Political Thinking'**

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## **Conclusion**

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